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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF DIVORCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

RONALD M. MANGAN

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

SPECIAL EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1991

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Children's Experiences of Divorce: A Phenomenological Study," submitted by Ronald M. Mangan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION** in **SPECIAL EDUCATION.**

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Dr. R. F. Mulcahy

Dr. E. Callan

Date: October 7, 1991

This book is dedicated

to my daughter,

BREE LORAINE MANGAN

For your inspiration, courage, and unfailing dedication. As I've watched you grow and become your own person, I am continually amazed by your sensitivity and understanding. You are truly a beautiful child who gives so much to others and yet you ask so little in return. I am very proud of you and I love you dearly.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate children's experiences of divorce. A phenomenological methodology was chosen because of the focus on everyday lived experiences. This methodology allowed for a thematic analysis of the children's experiences of the phenomenon of divorce.

There were four children involved in this study, ranging in age from seven to nine years old. Of these four children, three were girls and one was a boy. All of the children lived in joint physical custody arrangements where time since parental separation varied from one to six years.

While there were variations in each child's unique experience of the phenomenon, there were definite patterns of responses which were common to the experiences of the four children. Seventeen first order themes were generated and comprised the essential structure of the experiences of divorce. These were later refined to four third order themes which included; "Divorce as a Traumatic Event," "Experiences of Loss of Control," "Coping With Division vs Unity," and "Integration of the New Experiences."

In general, results of the study indicated that the children appeared to benefit from the active and commit-

ted involvement of both natural parents, as a result of their joint custody arrangements. However, evidence suggested that the children experienced a considerable amount of difficulty in adapting to the physical and psychological changes inherent in the divorcing process. The study highlights both the positive and negative experiences of the children and relates these findings to other research which has investigated children's experiences of divorce.

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Chapter I

Introduction

General Overview

Divorce is a process which is rapidly changing the traditional structure of families within our society. The pervasiveness and apparent social acceptance of divorce reflect the changing attitudes within our society, towards marriage. Marriage is no longer viewed by many as something that is lasting and permanent. The emotional and physical changes inherent in the divorcing process can be very difficult obstacles to resolve and unfortunately are not limited solely to the adults who are involved. The children of divorcing parents are also faced with significant changes in both their emotional and physical environments.

Recent U.S. statistics on divorce are useful in revealing the changing trends in the institution of marriage and are also helpful in illustrating the numbers of children who are affected by this process. From 1970 to 1982, the ratio of all divorced persons per 1,000 husbands and wives in intact marriages rose by 114%, from 47 per 1,000 to 109 per 1,000. In 1970, 85% of children under the age of eighteen lived in a traditional two parent family. By 1982, only 75% of these children lived in traditional two parent families. From 1970 to 1982 the percentage of children who lived in a one parent family

almost doubled from 12 to 22%, indicating that approximately one out of every five children under the age of eighteen lives in a one parent family. It is estimated that 1.2 million children every year experience the divorce or separation of parents (Hetherington & Camara, 1984).

The Question

Children of divorce are undoubtedly affected by the separation of their biological parents. Divorce causes children to experience rather dramatic changes in the structure of parental relationships. As families break apart, each parent-child relationship essentially swings free of the structure that has held it in place (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Each child must learn to accept and deal with the reality that mom and dad are not going to be living together any more. This frightening reality is only the beginning of many dramatic changes which inevitably can alter a child's world forever. In divorce, a child must redefine his or her relationship with each parent in a new, and otherwise unfamiliar family structure. A child quickly discovers that divorce and the subsequent absence of a parent are experiences that are filled with uncertainty and trepidation. For many children, this is an enormous change and one which is difficult to comprehend and come to terms with. The absence of a natural parent is a phenomenon that all children of divorce experience to some degree or another.

The objective of this study is to examine the

phenomenon of divorce from a child's perspective. The study will address the question of how a child actually experiences the separation and divorce of his or her natural parents. What is a child's experience of divorce? This study will examine the personal experiences of children who have gone through or are going through a divorce, with a particular focus on each child's experience of parental absence. How does a child experience parental absence in post-divorce family life? What is an actual child's experience of this phenomenon? Is each child's experience fundamentally different or are there similarities or patterns of responses which characterize children's experiences of divorce and parental absence? In examining the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence, the author will look specifically at the experiences of four children who range between the ages of seven and nine years old and are currently living in joint custody arrangements. By using a phenomenological approach to understanding each child's experience, the author will attempt to examine the underlying essence or structure of that child's experience and in doing so, attempt to discern similarities or differences in patterns of responses between the four children who are involved in this study.

Literature Review

General Overview of Divorce Research

In general, research on children and divorce has attempted to provide an understanding of how this process

affects children. Undoubtedly, divorce is a different experience for children and adults because the children lose something that is fundamental to their development, the family structure (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). To use Wallersteins' (1990) analogy, the family is in a sense, the scaffolding upon which children mount successive developmental stages from infancy to adolescence. This structure acts as a support for a child's psychological physical, and emotional ascent into maturity. With divorce, this structure collapses often leaving children without the necessary support to master important developmental challenges. To children, their world seems to be thrown into a state of chaos, one in which they can seemingly no longer rely on familiar relationships and patterns which previously provided needed support and protection (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990).

Much of the divorce related literature has focused on adjustment difficulties that children experience in the uncertain and changing world brought on by the dissolution of the nuclear family. The transition from the perceived stability of the nuclear family to the uncertainty of divorce and life with a single parent can at best be difficult and not all children's experiences are necessarily the same (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). There appears to be evidence to suggest that there are qualitative differences in how children at various developmental levels experience divorce (Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). These qualitative differences may also provide an important link in

determining how a child copes with the stress of unwanted changes which are intrinsically bound to the divorcing process (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

According to Hetherington (1979), the limited cognitive and social competencies of the young child and the young child's dependency on parents will be asscociated with different responses and coping strategies from those of more mature and self-sufficient older children or adolescents. As an example, Hetherington indicates that younger children are less able to accurately appraise parental motives and feelings and are more likely to be self-blaming in interpreting the cause of divorce. While older children still experience considerable initial pain and anger when their parents divorce, they are more able to assign accurately, responsibility for divorce and deal with emotional issues (Hetherington, 1979). Other researchers concur with this finding noting that children who have a greater capacity to understand and make sense of the disruptive events within their family tend to be more successful in developing successful coping strategies and achieving mastery over the many changes brought about by divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

While there are inevitably qualitative differences in children's responses to divorce, there seems to be certain general commonalities which characterize a child's initial reaction to divorce regardless of age or gender of the child. Judith Wallerstein, founder of the Center for the Family in Transition in Corte Medera California, has been a veritable pioneer in the field of

divorce research, heading a team of clinicians and researchers since 1971. According to Dr. Wallerstein, a child's first reaction to divorce is fear, accompanied by a deep sense of sadness and a profound sense of loss. Children experience a heightened awareness and concern not only for themselves but for their parents as well. They often feel intensely rejected and experience a yearning for their departed or absent parent. Children feel angry towards their parents, often feel helpless, and experience intense feelings of loneliness. Loyalty conflicts are common among children of divorce, as are feelings of guilt, and reconciliation wishes wherein the child desires the parents to be back together again. Within the context of these experiences, Dr. Wallerstein notes that divorce can be a profound catalyst for positive psychological change but it can also be a major stumbling block against such change or the beginning of lasting psychological difficulties (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990).

Methodological Concerns

Despite evidence suggesting that there are qualitative differences in children's reactions to divorce as well as commonalities in their experience, there is a suggestion in the literature that research findings are, in fact, equivocal and that they do not permit assertions that divorce has any single broad reaching impact on children (Longfellow, 1979). Contradictory findings within the research literature on children and divorce may be a product of different conceptualizations of

divorce. Conceptualizations of divorce within the literature fall roughly into two broad categories or themes. The first of these themes involves divorce as a traumatic or disastrous event in a child's life and tends to focus on the negative impact of this process. The second and more recent conceptualization of divorce focuses more on potential positive effects and tends to view divorce as an opportunity for development on the part of the child. These differences in the conceptualization of divorce and its impact on children have logically led to differences in research methodologies and consequently discrepancies in findings (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984).

The design of studies investigating the impact of divorce on children have largely followed the methods of natural science. Cross-sectional, correlational and single-group designs have looked at a number of variables which may effect a child's adjustment to divorce including; age, sex, temperament of the child, parent-child relations, mothers, fathers, interparental relationships, and custody arrangements. In general, designs have favoured samples of convenience which may make it difficult to generalize findings to the larger population of divorced families. When random sampling has been utilized, the accuracy of the findings seem to be limited by sample size. Obtaining a large enough sample to adequately examine the complex and highly personal issues surrounding divorce has been an imposing problem (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984).

Clinical studies of the effects of divorce on

children rely heavily upon the interview technique. In assessing the effects of divorce on children, these studies have attempted to understand the subjective views of parents, teachers, and children. Clinical research has allowed more of a focus on a child's perception of the divorce experience. These studies have contributed to our understanding of childrens' perceptions of parental absence while also providing a basis for examining effects of divorce within a longitudinal or long term framework.

Long Term Effects of Divorce

While there are very few definitive studies specifically designed to assess the long term impact of divorce on children, the consensus seems to support the belief that for a child, the readjustments that are required are likely to stretch over the years of childhood and adolescence (Wallerstein, 1983). More recent evidence suggests that the readjustment process may in fact continue to affect children of divorce, well into their adult lives (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1990).

It is evident from the literature, that divorce can have long term adverse effects on some children. A study by Brady, Bray, and Zeeb (1986), found that children from separated, divorced, and remarried families demonstrated more problem behaviours than children from intact families. Children from separated and divorced families showed higher incidences of immature behaviour, depression, sleep disturbances, tension, and hyperactive behaviour when compared to children from intact families.

These authors also found their results to be consistent with other studies and conclude that children of divorce have higher rates of delinquency, antisocial behaviour, depression, and behavioral disorders when compared to children who are raised in a traditional two parent family (Brady, Bray & Zeeb, 1986).

Hetherington, Cox and Cox, (1985) investigated the long term effects of divorce on children and found differences related to gender. Boys seemed to demonstrate more long term difficulties than did girls but, girls seemed to have a more difficult time with the remarriage of a natural parent (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985). The longer term adjustment difficulties of a child seem to be related to conditions associated with the quality of life in a household headed by a single parent. Two elements of a child's experience which appear to be related to difficulties in the long run are, the lack of availability of a non-custodial parent and the increased salience of a custodial parent (Hetherington, 1979). Custodial parents who are burdened by economic difficulties and caught up in their own anxieties and depression are less likely to function as adequate parents, leading to difficulties in adjustment for children. Children may also experience significant adjustment difficulties as a result of losing contact with their non-custodial parent.

Research indicates that a child who shows evidence of long term adverse effects associated with divorce may be experiencing difficulties because of the absence of a natural parent (Hetherington & Camara, 1984; Wallerstein

& Kelly, 1980, 1976, and 1975). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) studied the experiences of 131 children of divorce in a longitudinal study and found that there may be a strong link between parental absence and long term difficulties experienced by children. The majority of the children in this study were in mother custody situations. According to these authors, over one third of the children involved were still troubled and distressed after five years. The most common clinical finding was that of childhood depression. Typically, these children were not doing well in school or with friends and exhibited socially maladaptive behavior. Some early disturbances such as sleep problems, poor learning, or acting out, had continued to deteriorate to the point where these became chronic problems. Most of the children who were still showing signs of difficulty at the five year period shared some common characteristics. Common to these children was a feeling of rejection by the absent father because of his unreliable visiting or insensitivity and lack of interest during the visit. A surprising finding was that in spite of extreme unhappiness about their situation, most of the children held onto the hope that one day their father would care about them (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980, Wallerstein, 1980).

Parental Absence and Divorce

One of the most important things to keep in mind about the decision to divorce is that it is a decision made by parents and not children, and it is usually

viewed as solution to the problem of parents and not those of children (Hetherington & Camara, 1984). Children more often perceive divorce as a cause rather than a solution to their difficulties and most children respond negatively to the separation and loss of a parent (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These children, regardless of age, will generally experience a yearning for the absent parent and may entertain fantasies of reconciliation (Hetherington & Camara, 1984).

The relationship a child has with his or her parents after divorce has been considered to be one of the best predictors of a child's adjustment to this process (Hess & Camara, 1979; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). Children who are able to maintain good relationships with both parents in the post divorce period tend to show the best adjustment (Addington, 1986). These children seem to be more adept at mastering the changes inherent in divorce because of the love and support they continue to receive from both parents. Unfortunately, for many children this love and support is not available when it is most critically needed. Most children express dissatisfaction with reduced parental contact even when reasonable visitation has been established (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979). According to Addington (1986), the majority of these children would choose free access to non-custodial parents if they were given the choice. However, as she indicates a child's confidence in the relationship with the absent parent appears to be related more to the quality of the interaction during the visits rather than the actual duration or frequency of the

visits (Addington, 1986; Healy, Malley, & Stewart, 1990).

The interactions between a child and an absent parent have been studied in relation to the cognitive development of the child. Much of the research in this area has focused on the hypothesis that a child's interaction with parents may foster cognitive development and that a reduction in interaction may hinder this development. In children of divorce, the quality and quantity of parental interaction with both custodial and non-custodial parents can be substantially reduced. In general, studies focusing on the interactional nature of parent-child relations and cognitive development tend to draw negative conclusions (Shinn, 1978). Evidence has suggested that the absence of a parent seems to have a negative impact on a child's intellectual environment and cognitive development (Santrock, 1972). However, studies investigating the link between parental absence and cognitive development seem to suffer from methodological difficulties which may limit the generalizability of these findings. For example, frequently parental absence is examined without regard to the reason for the absence, its length, the child's age at its onset, or the availability of parental substitutes (Shinn, 1978).

The absence of a parent seems to be a commonly acknowledged negative effect of divorce on children (Auer, 1983; Hetherington & Camara, 1984). Some authors believe that this is the central issue in divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Research on post divorce family structures indicates that continued access to the absent parent can be very beneficial for a child. It is

important for a child to retain access to both parents in a physical and psychological sense (Luepnitz, 1986). According to Auer (1983), continued contact with the noncustodial parent after separation and divorce can be a positive influence on a child's sense of trust, self-concept and adjustment to divorce. She suggests that, regardless of how well children seem to cope, they are deeply affected by the loss of a parent. The psychological effects involved in the experience of parental absence will be different for each child and partially determined by the individual's age, sex, developmental stage, and environment (Auer, 1983).

A child's self-esteem and self-concept may also be directly affected when he or she loses or has diminished contact with a parent as a result of a divorce. When confronted with parental absence, children seem to have a difficult time feeling good about themselves and developing a sense of mastery over the environment (Auer, 1983). According to Auer, (1983) children who can reach out to their parents when they need them will have a greater sense of mastery over the external world and are more likely to internalize a positive self-image (Auer, 1983).

There appears to be a wide degree of variability in the adaptation of children to divorce and parental absence, particularly in the quality and intensity of responses. A common criticism of divorce literature relates to the lack of systematic procedures designed specially to assess a child's own perception of the process. An important fact that is often overlooked in

divorce literature is that the degree to which any experience affects a child depends in part on the way it is assimilated and understood by the child (Longfellow, 1979). A child experiencing divorce and consequent parental absence is in an active process of restructuring and interpreting the complex events before, during and after the separation. The nature of a child's perceptions surrounding the experience may greatly influence the extent to which a child is positively or negatively affected by the divorce (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980).

A commonly held belief in divorce literature is that the trauma of divorce can be minimized by a child's continuous open and easy access to both parents (Grief, 1979; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). Research indicates that post divorce family relationships are viewed as a key factor in a child's recovery from the divorce trauma (Steinman, 1981). Arbarbanel (1979) feels that it is important to recognize that while divorce alters family relationships, it does not necessarily end them. Her research suggests that a child who experiences divorce seems to have a much better chance of achieving a new sense of equilibrium in the adjustment process when both parents are still involved and there is minimal conflict between the parents (Glover & Steele, 1989; Arbarbanel, 1979). Positive post divorce parent-child relationships seem to mitigate the adverse emotional effects that children experience (Tennant, 1988).

Joint Custody

Joint custody is currently looked upon as one option

for divorcing parents who wish to minimize potential adjustment difficulties in a child's experience. Joint custody is a relatively new phenomenon in the world of divorce and one that, as Edward Poll (1981) suggests, affirms the concept that parents are forever. According to Poll (1981), parents are forever, is a concept in divorce whereby parents are reminded that they have continuing responsibilities for their children's well being. It is also a concept that ensures the rights of children of divorce to continue to receive the benefits of emotional involvement from both natural parents (Poll, 1981).

Being a relatively new phenomenon, there seems to be a lack of consensus regarding the actual definition of joint custody (Hagen, 1987). A distinction is made within the literature between joint legal custody and joint physical custody. Under joint legal custody, parents share in all major decisions affecting a child's welfare but the child usually remains with a custodial parent. The non-custodial parent is generally granted liberal visiting rights but is not actively involved in the day to day care of the child. Joint physical custody, as the term implies, not only involves shared decision making but also involves a child spending proportionately equal amounts of time living with each parent (Richards & Goldenberg, 1986). For the purpose of this study, the author will be focusing specifically on the latter definition of joint physical custody.

Joint custody has also created a great deal of controversy surrounding the advantages and disadvantages

of this type of custody arrangement. Concerns about joint custody include disruptions in the continuity of care, disruptions in a child's physical and social environment, and concerns regarding the difficulty a child may have in maintaining close relationships with both parents (Wolchik, Braver, & Sandler, 1985). More specifically, critics argue that joint custody may impede a child's development of a psychological parent and can lead to severe loyalty conflicts for a child. It is felt by some, that children need the continuity of a "psychological" parent who provides for a child's psychological needs through daily interaction and companionship and that this is essential for adequate post divorce adjustment (Wolchik et al., 1985).

Proponents of joint custody generally allude to the fact that many children living with sole custody mothers seem to suffer due to the vastly diminished contact with the non-custodial or absent parent (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Advocates of joint custody usually view it as an attractive solution which allows children to maintain support from both parents and thus helping the child to feel less abandoned by the non-custodial parent (Fidler, Saunders, Freedman, & Hood, 1989). Other arguments favouring joint custody maintain that these children have access to a wider network of adult role models, can more easily preserve relationships with the extended families of both natural parents, and are consequently exposed to more cognitive and social stimulation (Fidler et. al., 1989; Wolchik et. al., 1985).

Very few studies have actively sought to assess the

psychological impact of divorce, on children who live in joint custody arrangements (Kline, Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989). What evidence there is, indicates that children living in joint custody arrangements experience the same initial responses to divorce as children living in sole custody situations (Glover & Steele, 1989). According to Arbarbanel (1979), initial responses of anger, fear, and sadness are often followed by an experience of a renewed ability to function as a child begins to adjust to life in two separate homes. Her research indicates that joint custody children still experience reconciliation fantasies and undoubtedly miss the absent parent but they do not experience the severe parental loss that often accompanies sole custody settlements (Arbarbanel, 1979).

Luepnitz (1986) studied a group of children in a comparison of maternal, paternal, and joint custody and reported that in contrast to the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), the children in her study were not maladjusted. The parents in her study reported that their children had had emotional reactions to the divorce which conformed closely to those described by Wallerstein and Kelly but not with the same intensity or duration. She concludes that joint custody can be viewed as superior to sole custody primarily because joint custody children are able to retain two parents and as a consequence they are able to maintain strong psychological relationships with both parents (Luepnitz, 1986).

While some studies on the psychological impact of joint custody arrangements have reported increased self-

esteem, competence, and a diminished sense of loss for some children there is also a note of caution, as research also indicates, that a substantial proportion of joint custody children were visibly distressed and confused (Kline et al., 1989). Steinman (1981) found that a striking characteristic of joint custody children was an obvious empathetic nature and sense of loyalty towards both parents. However, she also reported that this sense of loyalty could be very burdensome for some children. In Steinman's (1981) study, 25% of the joint custody children expressed confusion and anxiety over their schedules, as they struggled to keep track of where they were supposed to be. These children were worried, frustrated, unhappy, and preoccupied with a sense of loss (Steinman, 1981).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1990) work related to joint custody eems to concur with the latter opinion, that joint custody may in fact create problems for children and that children raised in these types of custody arrangements are no better adjusted than children who are raised in sole custody homes. Their findings indicate that despite more access to both parents, joint custody children show neither less disturbance nor better social adjustment than sole custody children. These authors conclude that unfortunately, joint custody does not minimize the negative impact of divorce on children during the early post divorce period (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990).

Conclusions

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the research literature when some studies conclude that there are no significant differences in a child's experience of joint and sole custody while others indicate, that joint custody is clearly more beneficial to the emotional adjustment of children (Glover & Steel, 1989; Luepnitz, 1982; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). The scarcity of studies that evaluate children living in different types of domestic situations and the mixed results found in the research literature on joint custody, clearly indicate a need for further research investigating the impact of joint custody arrangements on a child's experience.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) believe that the study of divorce has been and remains a lonely field. With the magnitude of the problem increasing at an alarming rate, the number of investigations seem to be perilously low (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Research has emphasized that a child's adjustment to divorce depends on a configuration of factors at many levels including age, sex, temperament, parent-child relationships, interparental relations and environmental changes (Addington, 1986). Divorce signifies the collapse of the traditional family structure and as this structure collapses, children experience intense feelings of loneliness, sadness and fear (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The most negative feelings in a child's experience of divorce seem to be centered around the loss of a non-custodial parent (Glover & Steele, 1989). According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), children's fears seem to reflect confusion about

their future relationships with their parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). A child's long range adjustment following marital disruption seems to be highly dependent on post-divorce parental relationships as well as the child's own capacity to master the ensuing changes (Wallerstein, 1983).

Research studies must continue the effort to understand the factors that contribute to successful and deleterious outcomes of divorce for children; and with changing trends in custody arrangements, it has become increasingly important to examine the impact of these arrangements on children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). There is still much which needs to be understood in order to construct a profile of personal characteristics that enable children to achieve successful resolutions to the physical and psychological changes inherent in the divorce process.

Critics of divorce literature report that a common criticism of divorce research focuses on an apparent lack of systematic study while emphasizing a need for assessing the experiences of children (Steinman, 1981). To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to examine the actual experiences of children who are currently living in joint custody arrangements. The study will look at how each child experiences the divorcing process with a particular emphasis on each child's experience of parental absence. By using a phenomenological approach, the author will systematically examine each child's experience and then compare the experiences of the four children who are involved in this study. It is the

author's hope, that this inquiry will add to our understanding of a child's experience of divorce.

Chapter II

Foundations of Methodology

Rationale for a Phenomenological Approach

To understand the question of how a child experiences the phenomenon of divorce and subsequent parental absence, a qualitative methodology has been chosen because of its emphasis on understanding the meaning of experience. Natural science methodologies would not be appropriate for this type of inquiry. Natural science or experimental methods seek out lawful and determined relationships which ultimately can be manipulated, controlled and measured. These methods are based on empiricism and stress conceptual reasoning at the expense of experience. According to Colaizzi (1978), the elimination of human experience is forcefully achieved in experimental methods by adhering to rigid operational definitions and conceptions of objectivity. Methodological principles in this perspective tend to pre-establish and delimit the content of psychological inquiry (Colaizzi, 1978).

The nature of the inquiry requires a methodology which will allow one to examine how the subject experiences the phenomenon. A phenomenological approach will allow me the freedom to investigate how the subject encounters the world and how the world may influence the subject. In a sense the subject and the environment are

viewed as co-constituting each other and out of this co-constitution, meaning develops. The subject's meaning or interpretation of the world is the basis of human experience. The essence of this inquiry is a focus on the personal experience of the subject and the description and interpretation of that experience. Phenomenological research allows one to investigate the inner perspective of the person as opposed to the outer perspective of natural science (Polkinghorne, 1981).

In phenomenological research, the lifeworld of the subject is of central importance. According to Giorgi, the lifeworld means the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind (Giorgi, 1975). Lifeworlds include emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with the naturally evolving lives of individuals (Berg, 1989). The life world is essentially all of a person's physical and affective experiences and the meanings derived from those experiences. The lifeworld will be of fundamental importance in understanding a child's perception of divorce. I will, in a sense, attempt to enter each child's lifeworld in an effort to understand the essential structure of the experience of divorce and parental absence.

Selection of Co-Researchers

Quantitative research requires that participants in a study be selected according to the logic of sampling theory in order to ensure that data can be generalized to

a population. Interview participants for phenomenological studies, however, are not selected on the basis of criteria that will aid in statistical generalization (Polkinghorne, 1981). In contrast, phenomenological researchers can illuminate the phenomenon of interest (Wertz, 1984). According to Becker, (1986) a basic qualification for interview subjects is that they have salient experiences of the phenomenon in their everyday worlds. Preferred subjects would be centrally involved with the phenomenon and possess a willingness and capability to verbalize descriptions of their experiences (Becker, 1986).

Thus, participants in phenomenological research are chosen because of their intimate involvement with the phenomenon in question. These participants are often referred to as co-researchers because of the dialogal nature of the data gathering process. The researcher and co-researcher are said to be in a process of co-constitution whereby the researcher enters and affects the co-researcher's world and vice versa. Together they explore the question and illuminate the phenomenon. Through this process the researcher is able to develop an understanding of the subject's experiences and is in a position to interpret the structure of these experiences.

Interview Format

A semi-standardized interview format was used in this study. This technique was chosen because it allows for both structure and the freedom to explore the child's responses. According to Berg, (1989) this type of inter-

view involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked in a systematic and consistent fashion but allow the researcher the freedom to digress and probe far beyond the standardized questions (Berg, 1989). The ultimate aim of this technique is an attempt to approach, or enter, the world of the subject's perspective.

In the semi-standardized interview format used for this study questions were divided into three basic categories. The first group of questions pertained to background information and, in a sense, were designed to help put each subject at ease with the interview process. The second group were designed to elicit specific information regarding each subject's experience of divorce and parental absence. The final group of questions were probing questions of a flexible, non-standardized type designed to elicit more specific information regarding the nature of each subject's experience. Probing questions were used to zero in on each subject's feelings and elicit more specific information and descriptions related to these feelings. A complete listing of the interview format used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Reliability and Validity

Traditional quantitative research methodology views reliability as the degree to which a procedure yields the same result each time some attribute of an individual is measured. This form of reliability focuses on the consistency, dependability, and precision of measurement and inevitably, considerations of validity enter into proce-

dures which aim to assess reliability (Osborne, 1990). Reliability is always bound by the context within which it is found. According to Osborne (1990), measurement always involves the measurement of something which has to be conceptualized in order to be measured. This conceptualization inevitably involves concerns related to validity in that the nature of the construct being measured will have an effect on how it is to be measured (Osborne, 1990). In a sense, reliability turns into validity and then validity turns back into reliability (Wertz, 1986).

The primary criterion of qualitative reliability involves the persistence of meaning through factual variations (Wertz, 1986). It is important to remember that qualitative research does not attempt to ascertain objective truth but rather seeks to uncover essential structures of human experience. By examining the subjective lifeworld experiences of various individual perspectives, the researcher is able to establish a central core or essential structure of meaning common to these perspectives. According to Wertz, (1986) reliability in qualitative human science cannot be separated from validity since it has no other intention than to bring what is being studied into focus in its essential meaning (Wertz, 1986).

There are essentially four ways in which the validity of interpretations within this research can be assessed. All of these procedures are basically concerned with the validity of the interpretive meanings. The first method of assessing the validity of this

research involves the bracketing of the researcher's presuppositions or assumptions related to the phenomenon in question. By bracketing one's orientation to the phenomenon and carefully describing the procedures used in data analysis, the researcher provides the reader with an opportunity to understand how the interpretations of the data were arrived at (Osborne, 1990).

A second and equally important component in establishing the validity of this method involves a sharing of interpretive findings between the researcher and subject or co-researcher. This is done to ensure that the researcher has not distorted the context of the individual's experience. Interpretive findings can, in a sense, be directly validated through this process.

The third and perhaps the most important means of validating interpretations of phenomenological data lies in the juridical process of presenting coherent and convincing arguments (Osborne, 1990). It is essential that the reader be able to follow through each step of the data analysis in a logical and coherent fashion. In utilizing a logical and convincing approach to data analysis the reader, by adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, should be able to draw the same conclusions that the research demonstrates (Giorgi, 1975).

The fourth and final check on the validity of the interpreted structure of the phenomenon depends on the extent to which that structure reflects the experience of others who have encountered the phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). The essential structure of the experience of

divorce and parental absence found within this study should reflect the experiences of other children who encounter this phenomenon.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to specify the actual procedures utilized in a phenomenological analysis of data. Phenomenological research involves the study of lived experiences or more specifically, the world as we immediately experience it. Through phenomenological analysis we attempt to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. Through phenomenological writing there is an attempt to portray insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world (van Manen, 1988).

In phenomenological research, the researcher's focus is on the latent or deep structure of meaning as opposed to the manifest or surface structure. The methodology utilizes a thematic analysis in order to understand the essential structure of the experience. Once a thematic analysis has been undertaken and themes are aggregated into higher order clusters, the researcher's task will be to provide an exhaustive description of the fundamental structures underlying the experience. According to Polkinghorne (1981), the researcher's treatment of the data is to uncover the constituent parts and understand their relationship to the object of the study. In doing so, the researcher discovers the essentials or essences of the phenomenon's structure (Polkinghorne, 1981). For the purpose of this study, these essential structures

should reflect the lived experience of the child in relation to the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence.

Once the essence or nature of an experience is understood, the researcher is in a position to systematically outline the structure of that experience. But what are the actual steps in the phenomenological analysis of data which allow us to explicate the structure of the experience? How are we to analyze and come to understand a child's experience of divorce and parental absence by using a phenomenological method of inquiry? This chapter will answer these questions, addressing the specifics of the phenomenological methodology utilized to understand a child's experience of this phenomenon. Following this brief overview of the methodology, my rationale for choosing to study the experiences of children of divorce will be outlined. The reader will then be introduced to the concept of bracketing and its purpose in phenomenological research. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the subjects or co-researchers who have participated in this study. Finally there will be a step by step description of the actual procedures used in analyzing the data.

Rationale for the Study

Understanding how a child experiences the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence has been a curiosity of mine for the past several years. As a teacher, I have worked for the past ten years with elementary and junior high school students. My personal philosophy towards

teaching could best be described as holistic in nature, as I am deeply concerned about both the cognitive and affective development of my students. In striving to help children with their affective development, I feel it is important to demonstrate a genuine interest in each child's personal life. I try to develop an understanding of each child's personal interests outside of school. I also try to develop an understanding of each child's home life and the dynamics of the relationships within their families. Children seem to respond very positively to this and place a great deal of trust in me as they willingly share many details about their families. Through this contact, I have come to appreciate the difficulties which children experience and have been particularly aware of the large number of children in our classrooms who are from divorced families. These children have always been very open to sharing their experiences and seem to possess a need to discuss their feelings related to their parents and the divorcing process. I have always felt a very real sense of empathy for these children and have spent many hours discussing their hopes and fears and sharing in their sorrows and joys.

This was perhaps the beginning of my interest in divorce but undoubtedly the primary influence stems from a divorce in my own life, six years ago. With a young daughter, I became deeply concerned about how the divorce was affecting her development. It was shortly after my own divorce that I entered into the Master's Program in Education Psychology at the University of Alberta. Here, I discovered that some of my courses allowed me the

freedom to explore whatever I desired and that inevitably I would have to choose a research topic and explore, in great detail, the topic of my choice. I began studying the effects of divorce on children and eventually came to the conclusion that my research project for my thesis would be related to divorce. I continued to discuss divorce with my students and began truly to appreciate the difficult obstacles which these children face in their day to day lives. I was also continually monitoring my own child's experiences and assisting her with the many changes which she was forced to deal with as a result of my own divorce.

When it came time to seriously consider a research topic and focus in on a specific question, I decided to pursue a line of inquiry which would allow me to examine the experiences of children of divorce, with a particular emphasis on how children experience the absence of a natural parent. By this time, I had done a great deal of reading in the area of divorce literature and had acknowledged the importance of this research in helping us to understand how the process affects children in both positive and negative ways.

I was also particularly intrigued with the concept of joint custody as an alternative to traditional custody settlements and perceived a need within the field of divorce research to clarify the effects of this type of custody on a child's adjustment to divorce. I had also come to appreciate that children at different ages seem to have qualitatively different experiences of divorce and realized that I should restrict my study to examining

the responses of children within a specific developmental age group. I chose the seven to nine year old age range largely out of personal interest. This was the developmental age range that my own daughter was going through and I hoped that by focusing on children in this group, I would be able to develop a keener sensitivity to my own child's needs. I also perceived benefits for my professional development in choosing to examine the experiences of seven to nine year old children. As I am currently working with elementary school children, I felt that it would be beneficial in assisting me with my on-going concern for the affective development of those children who had experienced a divorce in their lives.

Given the nature of my interest in research, there was no doubt about which method of inquiry I would have to follow. A descriptive approach was ideally suited to the needs of my study and was consistent with other studies which have sought to understand a child's experience of divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The qualitative focus of the study would allow for an examination of each child's experience of divorce and parental absence and assist in understanding the various dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation.

Bracketing

An important component in phenomenological research is the concept of bracketing. This is essentially a process of self-reflection whereby researchers identify their presuppositions or biases towards the phenomenon

being investigated. Colaizzi (1978), indicates that researchers must ask certain questions of themselves in order to explicate their personal positions regarding the phenomenon of interest. Why am I involved with this phenomenon? How might the constituents of my unique personality condition my selection and study of this particular phenomenon to investigate (Colaizzi, 1978)? The intent of this section is to examine questions such as these in an effort to explicate my personal interest in the phenomenon and to identify my presuppositions or assumptions regarding a child's experience of parental absence. By so doing I hope to provide the reader with a framework for assessing the validity of data analyses and their interpretations (Wertz, 1985).

I have experienced a divorce in my own life which has left me acutely aware of emotional and physical adjustments which must transpire in order to accept and resolve one's feelings and get on with life. Through the divorce in my own life I was able to observe firsthand, how this process affected my child. My child still sees both myself and her biological mother on a regular basis. Although I have been able to observe my child's development and adjustment through the divorce, I often wonder how life must be for her with parents in two separate homes? This is undoubtedly the foundation of my interest in investigating the phenomenon of a child's experience of parental absence.

I have attempted to organize my thoughts with respect to a child's experience of divorce and parental absence into five major themes which will act as a focus

for my discussion. These themes, listed in the order in which they will be presented are: The Relationship Between Divorce and Parental Absence, The Loneliness and Longing Phase, The Struggle to Understand, A Child's Adjustment, and Reconciliation Fantasies.

(1) The Relationship Between Divorce and Parental Absence

Parental absence can, for the purposes of this thesis be defined as the physical and emotional non-presence of a child's biological mother or father during the normal day to day experiences of the child. It is my contention that the actual divorce and consequent parental absence are experiences of the child which are essentially inseparable. In a child's experience, divorce is conceived of as the cause of parental absence. To a child, divorce is the experience of parental absence while at the same time, parental absence is the experience of divorce. The two are inseparable. The interaction of these two phenomena create the child's experience of both divorce and parental absence and the meaning of that experience.

(2) The Loneliness and Longing Phase

The child's experience of parental absence is one that evokes an intense feeling of loneliness. In my experience, this is initially accompanied by a deep sense of sadness on the part of a child. As a child grieves, an awareness of wanting the physical and emotional presence of the absent parent becomes very real. A child, in a sense, longs for the past when both parents were to-

gether. This longing for the past is expressed through feelings of missing the absent parent. Initially, the feeling of loneliness and longing can be overwhelming but as time passes a child develops ways of coping with these stressful feelings. Successful resolution of feelings of loneliness will be highly dependent on the degree of parental absence. Continued access to both parents will help a child to develop coping mechanisms for dealing with feelings of loneliness. Children who experience the total loss of a parent or a non-custodial parent who is inconsistent in visiting the child will have a much more difficult time learning to cope with feelings of loneliness and longing for the past.

(3) The Struggle to Understand

I believe that a child's experience of parental separation and consequent parental absence is one that is laden with conflict. The dissolution of a marriage is generally an experience that generates varying degrees of hostility between separating parents and this, undoubtedly, will have an affect on a child's perception of the process. A child experiences an upset in the stability and consistency which two parents can provide, giving rise to a great deal of uncertainty and conflicting emotions. A child struggles to regain a sense of mastery over life while trying to understand how this could happen to them? In the process of trying to understand, a child may question who is ultimately to blame for this happening? Many children will hold themselves responsible for the separation of their parents.

(4) A Child's Adjustment

In my experience, children demonstrate varying degrees of overt adjustment in emotional and physical behavior when adjusting to the absence of a parent through divorce. The adjustment process seems to be related to the level of involvement of a child's natural parents. Children who retain two parents who are still actively involved in parenting seem to be better off than children who, in a physical or psychological sense, lose one of their parents. It is questionable whether overt acceptance of parental absence necessarily means that a child has covertly accepted the absence. I look at my own child's experience and see a young girl who has spent six years adjusting her life to the absence of one or the other of her parents. Although her parents are both actively involved in her life, they live in different homes. Outwardly, she seems to have accepted her lot in life and yet she still experiences moments of intense sadness and crying for no apparent reason. When asked to verbalize her feelings during these experiences, she has a difficult time expressing what exactly is the source of her sadness or needs. Whether she is aware of the reason and is not verbalizing this is certainly a possibility. These experiences have no doubt influenced my belief that children may never fully adjust to life without both of their natural parents. In a metaphorical sense, a child's experience of divorce and parental absence can be likened to a wound which requires stitches in order to close it up. The wound itself will heal, but the scar remains forever.

(5) Reconciliation Fantasies

My experience has led me to believe that many children of divorce still hold out hope or maintain fantasies that someday mom and dad will get back together again and life will be as it was prior to divorce. These reconciliation fantasies are very difficult for a child to relinquish. They seem to be a type of coping mechanism for dealing with the unpleasant reality of parental absence. Reconciliation fantasies may help a child to cope with unpleasant realities while at the same time enabling a child to keep alive pleasant memories from the past. As childhood memories begin to fade, reconciliation fantasies can endow these memories with a new sense of richness. I have come to believe that while the active involvement of both natural parents in post divorce parenting can be extremely beneficial to a child, this involvement may also act as a fuel for a child's reconciliation fantasies. My sense is that a child can equate cooperation in post-divorce parenting with a desire to reconcile on the part of the parents, however unrealistic this may be. Reconciliation fantasies seem to be an important component of a child's experience of parental absence. Exactly how enduring and stable these fantasies are is very difficult to ascertain.

Bracketing Conclusion

It would be unrealistic for me to undertake a study of this nature without recognizing my preconceptions of the phenomenon and how they have developed through my own experiences. An explication of these biases allows the

reader to understand my frame of reference in relation to the phenomenon which I have chosen to investigate. According to Giorgi (1975), the aim of phenomenological research is presuppositionless description, which is something that is not possible in an absolute sense because of a researcher's biases (Giorgi, 1975). By carefully and explicitly outlining one's biases, the researcher to some extent, is able to put such preconceptions aside in an effort to allow the data to "speak for themselves". The bracketing of one's preconceptions is also useful in assessing the validity of interpretations. As Kvale indicates, one approach to the validation of qualitative interpretations is making the perspective of the researcher upon a material as explicit as possible (Kvale, 1986).

Co-Researchers

In phenomenological research, participants in the study are often referred to as co-researchers in order to emphasize the cooperative and voluntary nature of the research (Osborne, 1990). The nature of the phenomenological inquiry process requires an openness on the part of these co-researchers to share their experiences with the researcher. (Polkinghorne, 1979). The researcher and co-researchers embark on a process of inquiry wherein the researcher attempts to enter into the co-researchers' worlds in an effort to illuminate the phenomenon being investigated. Thus, in order to adequately illuminate the phenomena, co-researchers must possess salient experiences of the phenomenon in their everyday worlds

(Becker, 1986). For the purpose of this study, co-researchers must be centrally involved with the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence. They must also possess a willingness and capability to explore their experiences.

Finding co-researchers who were willing to participate and who fell within the seven to nine year old age range was not an easy task. The qualification that these children must be in a joint custody arrangement was a further complication. Advertisements were run in the local newspaper and contacts were made through several schools within the local school districts. The initial response from parents who wished to have their children participate was encouraging but, as I quickly discovered, many of these children did not qualify as their custody arrangements did not suit the needs of this study. There were also children whose joint custody arrangements were satisfactory for my purpose but they did not possess the willingness or capability to adequately explore the phenomenon being investigated. After careful screening, four co-researchers were chosen for this study.

The initial contacts were naturally made through each child's parents. These parents were sent a letter outlining the nature of the study (see Appendix B) as well as a package of information related to the study. Parents were asked to review the information and speak with their children regarding their willingness to participate in the study. Given the nature of the joint custody arrangements involved with these children, I requested the consent of both parents before the children

were allowed to participate. The children were seen three times on average and were carefully informed of their right not to answer specific questions if they felt that they didn't want to. It was also made clear to them that they could choose to opt out of the study at any time if they felt this was necessary.

The first meeting with these children was a very informal gathering with myself and one of the child's parents. This informal meeting was designed to build trust in the co-researcher and also gave me an opportunity to assess each child's capability to explore adequately the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence. The second meeting with each child involved the actual semi-structured interview and this session was recorded on audio tape. The duration of the semi-structured interview was approximately one to two hours in length and varied with each child. After reviewing and analyzing the data, children were visited once again, to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data had not distorted the actual experience of each child. All meetings with the children took place in one or the other of their homes. Children and parents were informed that if they felt a need to discuss any concerns whatsoever, arising from the discussion of divorce and related issues, they were free to contact the researcher and would be provided with necessary support, according to their needs.

In order to protect the anonymity of each child, children were allowed to pick themselves a fictitious name and seemed to delight in this experience. While all of the children were understandably nervous about their

participation, in general, they were able to relax and explore their intimate experiences with the researcher. I am deeply indebted to them for their openness and honesty and was very moved by the experiences I shared with these children.

There were three girls chosen for this study, two seven year olds and one nine year old. There was one boy, who was eight years old. Two of the children, Amanda (7 years) and Stephen (8 years), were brother and sister while the other two, Linda (7 years) and Jenney (9years), were only children within their families. When the interviews were conducted, Stephen and Amanda's parents had been separated for approximately one year but had not as yet completed actual divorce proceedings, although this seemed imminent. Linda's parents had separated and divorced approximately four and half years ago while Jenney's parents had done the same, six years ago.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in phenomenological research is aimed at uncovering the essential structures of the phenomenon in question. The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is not a simple one-dimensional entity but rather is a multi-dimensional structure which consists of many parts, all of which comprise the whole. To understand how a child experiences divorce and subsequent parental absence, we must look at all the constituent parts of the experience and then synthesize these components into a logical and coherent whole. In order to do this, phenomenology utilizes a process of thematic analy-

sis. Phenomenological themes may be thought of as the essential structures of the experience and when synthesized into a coherent whole, they represent the experience of the phenomenon being investigated. The thematic analysis of data undertaken in this study is largely based on Colaizzi's (1978) model for content analysis.

Data analysis began with transcribing each child's interview into a written format. Each protocol was then read many times and key words and significant phrases were highlighted. At times, it was necessary to review the actual audio tape while perusing the protocol in order to focus in on significant statements which were related to each child's experience of divorce and parental absence. Once significant statements reflecting a child's experience were extracted, interpretive or paraphrased meanings were then attached to each of these significant statements. Here the researcher requires a certain creative insight in order to interpret accurately the meaning of the co-researchers description (Colaizzi, 1978). These interpretations are intended to reflect an initial understanding of the meaning a child attaches to the experiences of divorce and parental absence.

Once interpretive meanings were formulated, they were then assigned a thematic descriptor which relates specifically to the essential structure of a child's experience. Significant statements, paraphrased or interpretive meanings, and thematic descriptors are then placed in a tabular form (See Tables 2, 4, 6, & 8). These represent what is referred to as, the "First Order

Thematic Abstraction," of each child's experience. An example of this tabular format will be useful in understanding the procedures which were followed in this phenomenological analysis.

Example 1:

9. I would go to my bedroom and just sit down and think. I would probably have a couple of tears in my eyes.	At times my feelings are very painful and I feel sad.	Pain, Grief

In this example, the excerpt in column one is a significant statement which the researcher has identified as having relevance to the phenomenon being investigated. The statement in column two, is the interpretive or paraphrased meaning which the researcher has attached to the child's significant statement. Finally, column three contains the thematic descriptor which identifies an essential structure of a child's experience. In this tabular format, the researcher is able to get a feel for the essential structure of each child's experience. This type of first order thematic analysis is the first stage of a hierarchial process that allows the researcher to systematically outline the structure of each child's experience of the phenomenon.

Each child's interview is tabulated in this way and is presented as Tables 2, 4, 6, and 8, in the following chapter. These tables can be thought of as individual analyses of each experience or referred to as, the within group analysis. Each child's unique experience is important in capturing the essence of that experience while

also important for its value in comparing the similarities and differences in the experiences of the four children.

The themes generated from each child's experience, as found in these tables, are then clustered into second order thematic groupings (See Tables 3, 5, 7, & 9). These represent what is referred to as, the "Second Order Thematic Abstraction", of each child's experience. This is the second stage in the hierarchial process of data analysis. This process is the basis for the synthesis of a child's experience. Individual themes constitute the parts of each experience and as they are synthesized, we begin to grasp a picture of the whole or the composite structure of the experience of the phenomenon. In a sense, individual themes can be thought of as one-dimensional aspects of a child's experience and taken together, they form a multi-dimensional structure of that experience. By clustering each child's themes in this manner, we are able to view the essence or structure of the experiences of divorce and parental absence. Once again, it will be useful to use an example to understand the procedure that is followed in this step of the phenomenological analysis.

Example 2:

2. Divided Loyalties (1, 9, 16, 27)	Expresses a strong love for each parent and offers that neither parent was really to blame for the parental separation; expresses a desire to have each parent respond to her needs in a similar manner.

In this example, a child's clustered second order theme is identified in the first column. The numbers underneath the thematic clusters denote the initial themes from which the cluster is formed. The excerpt in the right hand column is a generalized description of a child's experience of the theme. These generalized descriptions are a composite picture of a child's experience of the given theme and taken together, represent the essential structure of the phenomenon.

Each child's themes are clustered in this fashion and these are presented as Tables 3, 5, 7, and 9, in the following chapter. These tables contain second order abstractions of experience and function as the basis for each child's synthesis in the within group analysis. These tables are also vitally important for comparing the experiences of each child in what is referred to as, the between group analysis.

The next step in the hierarchial process of phenomenological analysis is to display the second order clustered themes of all the children in a tabular format (See Table 10). Essentially, all of the identified themes from each child's experience are clustered together and a generalized description of each theme is prepared. These generalized descriptions reflect the essence of the experience of the theme for all children. Generalized descriptions are found in Table 10 in the following chapter and are utilized when comparing the experiences of the children in the between group analysis.

Following this procedure, the second order clustered themes for all children are presented in another varia-

tion which is useful for identifying which themes are, or are not, present in each child's experience (See Table 11). In Table 11, all second order themes are listed down the left hand column while each child's name is presented across the top of the table. This table is useful for identifying the presence or absence of a second order theme in each of the four children's experiences. This is simply a useful way for the reader to be able to visualize the second order themes for all children and will also be helpful in comparing the experiences of the children in the between group analysis.

A final step in the data analysis involves the generation of what are referred to as, "Third Order Clustered Themes" (See Table 12). These are a higher abstraction of the second order clustered themes from each child's experience. These third order themes are simply another way of looking at the essential structure of the experience of the phenomenon. They too, are useful in comparing the experiences of the four children involved in this study and will be utilized to guide the discussion of the composite picture of a child's experience of divorce.

In conclusion, the process of data analysis in this phenomenological research project can be thought of as a hierarchial procedure aimed at systematically outlining the essential structure of a child's experience of divorce and parental absence. By identifying the essential structure of each experience through this hierarchial process, the researcher is able to discern the uniqueness of each child's experience of the phenomenon. The re-

searcher is also in a position to compare the experiences of the four children in a descriptive format and relate these descriptions to other research which has investigated children's experiences of divorce.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Four contains the results and discussion of the phenomenological analyses of the four children's experiences of the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence. Initially each child's data will be dealt with in a separate manner constituting a within child analysis or more specifically, the unique experience of each child. Following this, the between child analyses will compare and contrast the essential structures of the experiences of the phenomenon being investigated. This final synthesis will present a composite picture of the four children's experiences.

An overview of the data analysis is presented in Table 1. This table will assist the reader in following the hierarchial procedures which constitute the phenomenological process of data analysis. The reviewer will be provided with a brief introduction to each of the four children who participated in this study. These introductions will focus on pertinent information relevant to each child.

Following this introduction each child's interview will be presented in the tabular format outlined in the previous chapter. These are the "First Order Thematic Analyses" of the essential structures of each child's experience (See Tables 2, 4 ,6, & 8). As outlined in the previous chapter, these tables contain significant

statements from a child's interview, interpreted or paraphrased meanings, and thematic descriptors assigned to describe the essential structure of the experience.

The "Second Order Thematic Analyses" of each of the four children are then presented (See Tables 3, 5, 7, & 9). These table summarize the themes identified in the previous analyses and outline the essential structure of each child's experiences of the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence.

Tables 2, through 9, contain information which is important for understanding the four children's experiences of divorce and parental absence. They provide a systematic analysis of the essential structure of each child's experience of the phenomenon being investigated in this study. Once the essential structure of each child's experience has been explicated, a written synthesis of the experience will be presented.

The "Second Order Themes for all Children" are presented in Table 10 and a generalized description of each theme is provided. Table 11 contains a visual representation of the presence or absence of a given theme in each of the four children's experiences.

Finally, the "Third Order Clustered Themes" are presented in Table 12. These are essentially a higher abstraction of the "Second Order Themes for all Children." Utilizing all the information from Tables 2, through 12, the author is finally in a position to provide a composite synthesis of the four children's experiences and compare the similarities and differences in the children's experiences.

The results of the phenomenological data analyses from this chapter will be important for the last chapter of this study. Here, the author will examine the results and significant findings of this study and relate these findings to other studies which have investigated the experiences of children of divorce.

Table 1

Overview of Data Analysis

Within Persons Analysis			Between Persons Analysis	
Co-researcher	First Order Themes	Second Order Clustered Themes	Second Order Themes for all Children	Third Order Clustered Themes
Stephen	Table 2	Table 3		
Amanda	Table 4	Table 5	Table 10	Table 12
Linda	Table 6	Table 7	Table 11	
Jenney	Table 8	Table 9		

Stephen

Stephen was eight years old when interviewed for this study and had recently completed Grade Three. He was of average height and weight, and had blond hair and green eyes. Stephen seemed to have a good sense of humour and enjoyed art, card collecting, and hockey. While Stephen's progress in school had been satisfactory, he was apparently prone to day dreaming and off task behavior. He seemed to have no difficulty socially in establishing and maintaining friendships within his peer group. Stephen was seven years old when his Mom and Dad separated and although his parents had not as yet completed divorce proceedings, they were impending.

Stephen came from a middle class background where both of his parents worked at full time jobs. When not attending school, Stephen was cared for by private sitters during his parents' working hours. The nature of the joint custody arrangement allowed Stephen's parents to remain physically and psychologically active in his life.

Early in the post-separation period, Stephen's parents were able to agree upon a joint custody settlement which allowed him and his younger sister to spend approximately equal amounts of time with both their Mom and Dad. Stephen and his sister would spend one week at each parent's home and typically would alternate homes on Thursdays. On these days, Stephen would be dropped off at school in the morning by one parent and would be picked up at the end of the day by the other parent.

This pattern continues to this date.

Considering all of the children who were involved in this study, Stephen seemed to be the most uncomfortable with the interview process which was necessary to explore the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence. He was uneasy at the beginning of the formal semi-structured interview but unlike the other children, he did not seem to be able to relax and feel at ease in sharing his feelings and experiences. Apparently Stephen had experienced difficulty in expressing his feelings throughout the separation process and had not really confided in anybody since his Mom and Dad went their separate ways.

Table 2

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Stephen's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrased Meanings	Themes
1. When I was at my Dad's house and my Mom just moved into her house, it made him very sad that they had to move.	I remember being very sad when Mom and Dad first separated.	Grief
2. He said it makes me very sad because that we had to move and it felt not so very good ... it was a sad feeling.	I was deeply hurt when Mom and Dad separated. It was a very sad time for me.	Pain, Grief
3. We first stayed with my Dad and then moved in with my Mom. It was sometimes not so very good ... we switch on Thursdays, sometimes I am at my Dads when I tell my friends that I am going down to the lake to catch some frogs or lizards with them and then on Thursdays I go to my Moms and then I remember about all that.	It is very difficult getting used to my parents separating. I miss being able to do things with my friends when I am at my Mom's house.	Adjustment Difficult, Pain, Loneliness
4. Before when I was going to move I didn't feel so good ... but now its feeling okay ... I'm one week with Dad and one week with my Mom and it keeps on going back and forth.	My life has been hard since my parent's separation. To cope with the pain, sometimes I deny my true feelings.	Adjustment Difficult, Pain, Denial
5. I was scared when they moved ... they just started fighting.	Mom and Dad's fighting scared me.	Fear-Anxiety
6. Well if there is something special ... like my Mom's gonna see one of	When I miss my friends I feel sad and lonely.	Loneliness, Grief, Helplessness

my friends ... and that makes me feel sort of sad because I don't get to see my friend that one time and sometimes I feel sad because my Mom, no one is visiting my Mom.	When I am at Dads, I miss my Mom.	
7. Well, sometimes people call me at my Dads because I have most of my friends there. So most of them call me and then when I come back home, some of them aren't home.	I find moving between two homes difficult. I,m lonely without my absent parent and my friends.	Adjustment Difficult, Loneliness
8. Like when I just came back from my Dad's house, my friend Garret he kept on calling me because ... he wanted to play with me and stuff like that and soon as I got back he is gonna go to the lake.	I find moving between two homes difficult. I,m lonely without my absent parent and my friends.	Adjustment Difficult, Loneliness
9. First of all if they weren't separated I would still be living in the house I was born or raised up at.	I love both my parents and I wish they were not separated.	Need for Both Parents, Reconcili-ation Wish
10. ...then we would still be living in that house because one person he just can't pay most for the house, so you have to have two people to pay for a house.	I worry that we won't have enough money to be able to stay in my Dad's house.	Fear-Anxiety, Helplessness
11. My Dad said if we each eat our piece of steak I'll take you to West Edmonton Mall and then we can't go, with my Mom any more to West Edmonton Mall.	I wish Mom and Dad were not separated so we could still do things together as a family.	Reconcili-ation Wish
12. We have Nintendo downstairs and my Dad came over for Christmas ... he	I miss being with both my parents especially during	Need for Both Parents,

tried to play Nintendo with me and it was the first time he played Nintendo with me.	special times like Christmas.	Loneliness
13. I wish we could stay in that white house that I was born at ... all my friends are there.	It has been hard to get used to living in two different houses.	Adjustment Difficult
14. Probably paying their insurances, because they need two people to pay bills and all that for a house ... so unless my Dad gets a new job and he gets more money paid for it, so then we can live in the white house.	I worry about losing the security of my Dad's house. The thought of moving from there scares me.	Fear-Anxiety, Helplessness
15. I am worried about that because if my Dad can't pay that much then I would have to live with my Mom because what if he can't pay his insurances any more and we can't live in the house.	I am afraid that if we lose Dad's house, I won't be able to see him any more.	Fear-Anxiety
16. Its sometimes okay and sometimes its not really okay, sometimes its not.	Sometimes I feel confused about how I really feel.	Confusion, Adjustment Difficult
17. Cause when they went to the West Edmonton Mall Waterpark, we went with our cousins and they sort of missed that my Mom couldn't come with us.	I miss being able to do things with both my Mom and Dad. I wish they were together.	Loneliness, Reconciliation Wish
18. Like right now, today and my Mom has to go to a wedding and then I get to go see my Dad and I'm sort of happy for that.	I love both my parents and need to see and feel loved by them.	Need for Both Parents
19. ... If my Mom can't get a babysitter or something like that my Dad	I see that sometimes Mom and Dad cooperate and	Sense of Relief

will take care of us because its Saturday for him ... so Mommy just calls my Dad to take care of me.	can still help each other when it comes to taking care of me.	
20. Cause I can remember a time when they were separated and they both came to Boston Pizza with me. I was sort of happy.	I feel good when we can still do things together as a family. I wish Mom and Dad were still together.	Sense of Relief, Reconciliation Wish
21. Yes, not as much as you want .... its okay to phone our Dad sometimes but not our Mom because our Mom is very, very busy.	I need to be able to talk with both of my parents when I want to. It bothers me that sometimes Mom is too busy to talk.	Need for Both Parents
22. Lets see, well I don't think so. Actually I think that she could be a little happier but I'm sort of sad that they are not together.	My parents separation has caused a lot of sadness for me. I wish Mom and Dad were together.	Grief, Pain, Reconciliation Wish
23. Yeah, I'm happy right now but the one thing about my life and the white house I was living in was ... sometimes I am sort of happy about the white house, sometimes.	Memories of my family and the white house are sometimes painful. To cope with the pain, sometimes I deny my true feelings.	Pain, Denial
24. If my Dad is going to move to a new house, and I forget now. I get mixed up with the phone numbers because we are living away ... I have to remember two phone numbers again, but I get mixed up with my white house's phone number.	There are some things that are confusing when you live in two homes. I find this hard to get used to.	Confusion, Adjustment Difficult
25. I remember my Mom	I have blocked	Pain,

crying but I don't remember that I ever cried.	out some of my painful experiences.	Denial
26. Um, better or worse? I think it got, got a little better because the fighting has stopped and I think that everything wouldn't be too good.	My parents' fighting used to bother me a lot. I feel better without them fighting.	Pain, Sense of Relief
27. I think I got along better with Mom and Dad before ... because then she wouldn't have so many worries ... she wouldn't be busy to go to the shopping ... and she used to talk with me a lot.	I felt happier when Mom and Dad were not separated. I miss being able to talk with my absent parent.	Reconciliation Wish, Need for Both Parents
28. I get along better with Dad ... because when he was living in Parkton he doesn't fight as often.	I'm glad that Mom and Dad don't fight any more.	Sense of Relief
29. I would try to make them stop fighting and put them back together and make them be back together again.	If I could change something, my parents would be together without all the fighting.	Reconciliation Wish, Pain
30. Yeah, I think my Dad is sometimes lonely ... most of the times.	I'm lonely without my Dad.	Loneliness
31. Sometimes I feel lonely cause I want to go to my Dad's house and play with my teddy bears and stuff like that, so I go when there are papers and stuff at my Dads and mail and we go pick it up on Thursdays at dancing. So we go pick it up and my Dad says, I missed you.	I feel lonely when I am away from Dad's house. I miss him and the secure feeling that my white house brings me.	Loneliness, Adjustment Difficult
32. Its been sort of easy getting used to living in	Sometimes I feel confused about	Confusion, Adjustment

two homes, well ... I don't know, I can't.	how I really feel.	Difficult
33. Yeah because if Daddy kept on fighting, they would keep getting worse and worse.	My parents not fighting any more has helped me a little bit.	Sense of Relief
34. Yeah, I told some of my friends, I shared that with some of my class.	I needed to share my feelings with some of my friends.	Need for Others' Acceptance
35. There is one girl, she moved in this year, her name is Nadia and her Mom and Dad are divorced and her Dad is, I think in New York and her Mom lives in Edmonton ... I think that is where she is going to go this year to see her Dad, because she hasn't seen her Dad like in two years ... sort of sad.	I feel sorry for other children whose parents are divorced. They must feel sad like I do. Its hard not being able to be with both of your parents.	Grief, Adjustment Difficult,
36. I wish that they would get back together again ... number two would be that they stop fighting.	I want Mom and Dad to live together again without fighting. The fighting really bothered me.	Reconcili-ation Wish, Pain
37. And number three would be um ... Mom and Dad not to move out of Sherwood Park because lots of my friends are there and where me and my friend go to the card shop.	I want Mom and Dad to live together again in our home in Sherwood Park.	Reconcili-ation Wish

Table 3

Second Order Thematic Abstraction of Stephen's Experience

Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1. Pain (2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 36)	Child is deeply hurt over parental separation; sadness and loneliness are experienced as painful feelings; memories of past family life are painful; memories of parents' crying and sadness are distressful; memories of parental fighting are experienced as painful.
2. Confusion (16, 24, 32)	Experiences confusion about how he really feels; experiences confusion related to living in two separate homes.
3. Fear-Anxiety (5, 10, 14, 15)	Sense of being scared when having to move; expresses fear of parental conflict and fighting; worries about having to move from Dad's house; fear of losing security from the past; fears losing contact with his Dad; expresses anxiety related to parents' financial situation.
4. Grief (1, 2, 6, 22, 35)	Child experiences sadness when parental separation first occurred; experiences sadness over being away from friends; his sadness is a painful experience; he experiences sadness over not being with his absent parent; sadness seems to be an enduring experience.
5. Loneliness (3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 17, 30, 31)	Child experiences longing for old nuclear family structure; misses contact with friends and being able to do things with them; loneliness creates sadness and feeling of helplessness; lonely for absent parent; special times like Christmas are particularly difficult; longing to be able to do things with both Mom and Dad together; pines for security of the past.
6. Helplessness (6, 10, 14)	Loneliness and sadness create a feeling of helplessness; loss of security that nuclear family brought creates a feeling

	of helplessness; loss of security causes anxiety.
7. Need for Both Parents (9, 12, 18, 21, 27)	Expresses love for both parents; experiences a need to be able to do things with both parents; expresses a need to be able to share special times like Christmas with both parents; needs to love and feel loved by both Mom and Dad; experiences a need to communicate with his absent parent.
8. Reconciliation Wish (9, 11, 17, 20, 22, 27, 29, 36, 37)	Child expresses a wish that they had never separated to begin with; strong desire to do things as a family; senses that having Mom and Dad back together will ease his painful experiences; expresses a need to ease personal suffering and bring back happiness and perceived stability; need for security of the past.
9. Sense of Relief (19, 20, 26, 28, 33)	Child experiences a feeling of pleasure that parents can still cooperate over children; feels good that occasionally parents still do get together; relieved that parental fighting has ceased; experiences a sense that lifting of overt conflict between his parents has been helpful.
10. Adjustment is Difficult (3, 4, 7, 8, 13, 16, 24, 31, 32, 35)	Separation of his Mom and Dad has been a hard experience; experiences difficulty in maintaining contact with friends; separation has created sad and painful feelings; had difficulty coping with painful feelings; adjusting to living in two separate homes is hard; experiences confusion in feelings; transition between two homes is confusing; loneliness is difficult to get used to; loss of security; adjusting to parental absence is troublesome.
11. Need for Others' Acceptance (34)	Child expresses a need to share his feelings with his friends.
12. Denial	Sadness, loneliness, and other painful

(4, 23, 25)	experiences are difficult to cope with; denial of feelings helps in coping with the pain; memories of nuclear family can be painful experiences; tendency to try and block out painful memories.

A Synthesis of Stephen's Experience

Stephen's experiences of divorce and parental absence were similar in some respects to his sister Amanda's experience particularly in the intensity of the feelings he was experiencing (See pages 83 to 88). However, Stephen did not seem to be as aware of his feelings and he did not appear to have succeeded in establishing a sense of acceptance over the separation of his parents. He was clearly troubled by the many physical and psychological changes brought about by the separation and impending divorce of his Mom and Dad.

Stephen felt a deep sense of hurt over the parental separation and the sadness and loneliness he felt were painful experiences which caused him a great deal of distress. He seemed to be haunted by memories of his past and these memories often proved to evoke painful feelings. He often thought about how his life used to be when his parents were together. He vividly remembers moments of great sadness, when he watched his Mom and Dad crying and this created considerable discomfort in his experience. When asked if he remembers crying himself, he offers that he has no recollection of this. There is a definite sense that he has blocked out some of his more painful memories and often denies his true feelings in an effort to maintain a sense of psychological equilibrium and cope with his unpleasant feelings. He seems to have no recollection of any anger directed towards his parents, or himself, as a result of the separation.

Stephen does express a sense of sadness over losing

some of the contact he used to enjoy with his friends. As he now has to move between two homes, he feels that he has less time to spend with his friends and cannot do some of the things that he used to be able to do with them. As he spoke about the sadness over losing this contact, it became evident that these feelings were closely related to the grief he was experiencing over having to be away from one of his parents. Stephen's feelings of sadness are an enduring experience at this point in his life.

Fear and anxiety are prevalent in Stephen's experience of divorce. He admits that the parental hostilities and conflict that preceded the separation, evoked a good deal of fear and anguish in his experience. He acknowledges that fear and worry were common feelings when his parents first separated and his Mom moved out of the family home. He expressed anxiety over his parents' financial situation as a result of the separation and worried that if his Dad did not have enough money to pay the bills, they would probably have to move. He was afraid of losing the perceived security of his original family home and this fear was directly related to a fear that he might actually lose contact with his Dad. In Stephen's experience, he was fearful that given the changes which had already occurred in his life, he might indeed come to a point where he would no longer be able to see his Dad.

Stephen, in a very real sense, pined for the past longing for the stability of the old pre-divorce nuclear family structure. He experienced loneliness over the

reduced contact with his friends and was clearly experiencing a longing for his absent parent. He worried that his absent parent was lonely without him and in a sense, projected his lonely feelings onto the absent parent and his friends. Special occasions like Christmas were particularly difficult times which seemed to make him acutely aware of his feelings of loneliness. Like the pain, sadness, and fear, Stephen's feelings of loneliness were enduring experiences at this point in his life. At times, in order to cope with the loneliness, Stephen would deny the true nature of his feelings.

Loneliness in Stephen's experience was closely associated with distressingly painful feelings of sadness, creating a feeling of helplessness for him. Parental absence and the loss of security that his nuclear family gave him helped to create this feeling of helplessness in his experience. His anxiety over parental finances seemed to add to these feelings as he sensed a loss of control over his life and feared losing his Dad.

Stephen acknowledged feeling confused at times about his feelings. He seemed to find moving back and forth between two homes, a confusing experience. He offered the sense that living in two homes can be an experience that is difficult to get used to because it sometimes made him feel mixed up. He seemed concerned that he had to remember two phone numbers and while at first this appeared to be a trivial detail, it was the source of great consternation for him. This concern was a reflection of the instability and confusion he was experiencing

as a result of living in two separate homes.

Stephen admits that the separation of his Mom and Dad has been, and continues to be a difficult experience which he has had trouble adjusting to. Parental absence has been a very onerous experience for him and one that he has not as yet grown accustomed to. The loss of security and issues surrounding these experiences proved to be arduous at times, as were his feelings of helplessness and confusion. Stephen was clearly troubled by some of his experiences and had difficulty in understanding his feelings and expressing his needs.

Stephen obviously loved both of his parents and clearly experiences a need to feel loved and supported by them. He expresses a strong desire to be able to communicate with both of his parents whenever he feels a need to do so and feels troubled when he does not receive the attention that he is looking for. Reconciliation fantasies are a very real part of Stephen's experience as he openly admits that he wishes that his Mom and Dad had never separated to begin with. He expresses a strong desire to be able to do things together as a family and offers the sense that having his Mom and Dad back together again would help to ease the pain which he is experiencing over the parental separation. When asked about his three wishes, Stephen wished that he could stop his parents fighting and put them back together again, in his white house. He seemed to crave the perceived security and stability which his former nuclear family offered him.

While Stephen's experiences were predominantly

negative at this point in the divorcing process, he did feel a sense of relief over the cessation of overt hostilities between his parents. The parental fighting prior to the separation caused considerable discomfort for him and as this ended, Stephen felt like a slight load had been lifted from his shoulders. While he would gladly trade his situation now for the pre-divorce family structure, he was also relieved to see that his parents could still cooperate and that he had not lost contact with either of them. While he struggled to overcome the many hardships which he faced, the post-divorce cooperation between his parents offered some solace in his otherwise distressing experiences.

Stephen did seem to express a need to be accepted by his friends and a willingness to share his feelings with them. However, indications are that he has had difficulty in sharing his true feelings and seems to hold quite a bit inside. In doing so, he is shouldering a very heavy load for a child his age.

Amanda

Amanda was seven years old when interviewed for this study and had recently completed Grade Two. She was a rather diminutive child with short blond hair and blue eyes. She had a bubbly, warm personality and proved to be a very verbal child. Amanda was involved in dancing and calvinettes and was also an avid young reader. She seemed to be doing very well in school and was obviously well liked by her classmates. Amanda was six years old when her Mom and Dad separated and although formal divorce proceedings had not been completed at the time of this study, they were nonetheless imminent.

Amanda came from a middle class background where both parents worked at full time jobs. Prior to reaching school age in the pre-separation period, Amanda was cared for by private sitters, during her parents' working hours. As with the other children in this study, there seemed to be a good deal of cooperation between her parents as both parents strived to remain physically and psychologically active in her and her brother's life.

Early in the separation period, Amanda's parents were able to agree upon a joint custody settlement where she and her brother would spend approximately equal amounts of time with each parent. Amanda would spend an entire week with each of her parents and typically transferred from one house to the other on Thursdays. On this so called transition day, she would be dropped off at school by one parent and picked up at the end of the day

by the other parent. This pattern continues to this date.

Amanda was very inquisitive as to my purpose in conducting this research. She asked many questions and after seemingly allaying her fears, was very excited about her participation in this study. At the beginning of the formal semi-structured interview she exhibited a slight degree of nervousness but was quickly at ease and figuratively speaking, talked a mile a minute. I began to fear I was going to run out of audio tape as she literally would take questions out of my mouth and answer them, before I had even asked them. She was a charming young girl who took a great deal of pride in her ability to verbalize her experiences. She welcomed the opportunity to discuss her feelings. During our follow up interview, she again displayed an exuberance and trust in me which was truly remarkable and very moving. She has expressed a need to maintain contact with myself and was assured that this will transpire.

Table 4

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Amanda's Experience

Excerpts From Transcribed Interview	Paraphrased Meanings	Themes
1. Sometimes things are scary ... like if Mom and Dad do get divorced, that is what is scaring me.	I am afraid of what is happening to my family.	Fear-Anxiety
2. I remember that we used to be swimming together and we used to go down to our grand-parents houses together but my Mom and Dad still get together sometimes.	I enjoyed doing things with both of my parents, as a family. I want my parents to be together.	Reconciliation Wish
3. Like one time when I switched to my Dad's house my Dad comes over to this house and ... he had maybe some coffee or tea with my Mom and he talks about things.	I like it when my parents still do things together. I want my parents to be together.	Need for Both Parents, Reconciliation Wish
4. Pretty good ... they are getting more used to each other and I think that they are not going to get divorced because now they are not really fighting any more.	It is a good feeling when Mom and Dad don't fight any more but I would still like them back together.	Sense of Relief, Reconciliation Wish
5. It sort of feels good for me ... some things that I like about it is that I have two holidays and two things or two bedrooms or two houses, that's what I like about it.	There are some good things about the way my life is right now.	Acceptance
6. I was really gonna worry but I had nothing really to worry about	My parents separating has caused some scary	Pain, Fear-Anxiety,

because they are getting, they are probably going to move back together again, so I wouldn't really worry.	and painful feelings. Sometimes this causes me to deny my true feelings. This helps me cope with the scary and painful feelings.	Denial Reconciliation Wish
7. I was really kind of happy because they weren't fighting and when they probably get used to it ... I think they will be separated but I don't think they are getting divorced.	I am happy that Mom and Dad don't fight any more. But sometimes I am confused about what is happening and how it will all turn out.	Sense of Relief, Confusion
8. Sometimes I would go to my Dad and say, this isn't fair and I cry because it is not really funny or something really good happening.	The separation of my parents makes me sad and I feel helpless because I have no control over the situation.	Grief, Helplessness
9. I would go to my bedroom and just sit down and think. I would probably have a couple of tears in my eyes.	At times my feelings are very painful and I feel sad.	Pain, Grief
10. ... its going real well because they are not fighting any more.	I am glad that Mom and Dad are not fighting any more.	Sense of Relief
11. Like when my Dad comes here they don't fight so I think they are going to quit, so I think they are going to move back together again but I am, I really don't have an idea.	I am happy that they do not fight any more but I am sometimes confused about what is happening and how it will all turn out.	Sense of Relief, Confusion Reconciliation Wish
12. Sometimes I am not comfortable in this house	It is hard adjusting to	Adjustment Difficult

so I said, Daddy can I sleep at your house.	living in two separate homes.	
13. ... but I lived there all my life and I sort of like that and this is my first time moving.	It is a scary feeling losing the security of my original family home.	Fear-Anxiety
14. Sometimes I really feel good that they are separated because then it makes me happier and they won't fight.	I am glad that Mom and Dad are not fighting any more.	Sense of Relief
15. Toys always stay in the same place but clothes, sometimes I wear clothes that my Mom bought so I have to bring them back ... My Dad doesn't really worry so I can just wear anything to my Dad's house.	I feel like I have to be careful of what my parents are feeling because I want to please both of them.	Divided Loyalties
16. No, I think it was both of their faults ... because sometimes they yell at the same time and I don't really know who started it.	I love both of my parents and don't really want to blame either one for what is happening.	Need for Both Parents, Divided Loyalties
17. Sometimes I think that I have part of the thing. Like one time when I wanted my Mom's attention ... and I was so out of tension that I threw a tape holder at her so it landed on her cheek ... and so she kind of slapped me on my cheek ... and my Dad said, "its red," and my Mom said, "its not," so sometimes its a little hard to tell who started it.	Sometimes I think I may have been the cause of the problems between my Mom and Dad.	Self-Blame
18. But sometimes I think that one I started,	Sometimes I think I may have been	Self-Blame

because I wanted attention ... I could have just talked to my Dad and why was I so stupid and I will probably always remember that.	the cause of the problems between Mom and Dad.	
19. Its kind of scary because ... sometimes I don't know, well if my Mom goes to the garbage with my brother, but this is only for about two minutes, so I sort of feel that sometimes I am scared when I am all by myself.	Sometimes I feel lonely and this is a scary feeling for me.	Loneliness, Fear-Anxiety
20. When I am at my Dads, I am scared for my Mom. But my Dad is never scared. I've always talked to him and he is never scared so I shouldn't really worry about him but sometimes I have a feeling that I should worry about him ... I worry about my Mom too, that she is going to get killed or something, but I don't really know.	I love both my parents and when I am away from one or the other, I feel lonely. I worry that something might happen to my absent parent and this thought frightens me.	Loneliness, Fear-Anxiety, Adjustment Difficult
21. I got lots of things that I liked from Dad and then I got lots of things that I liked from Mom ... my Mom didn't give me that much because lots of things that she gave me were expensive and my Dad had really good things but they weren't that expensive as what my Mom gave me ... I am not trying to say that my Mom is better than my Dad, its just that my Mom buys less things because they are more expensive and it doesn't mean that my Dad's	I love both my parents and although they are very different, I don't like comparing one to the other. They are both very good to me.	Divided Loyalties, Need for Both Parents

stuff is bad.

22. Sometimes I feel more comfortable with my Dad because my Dad has a bigger house and small houses, I really don't like that, because I'm scared that somebody is going to come in the window or something.	I feel safer when I am at my Dad's house because it is more familiar and secure for me.	Fear-Anxiety, Adjustment Difficult
23. I sort of like to talk to my Dad ... he really talks things out well, but my Mom is always busy with stuff so I don't really like to bug her or anything because then its going to make her feel bad.	I need to be able to share my feelings with both of my parents. It bothers me that sometimes Mom seems too busy to be able to do this.	Need for Both Parents
24. I would rather have them together ... sometimes I feel like going with my whole family. Like when I go to my cousins or something, the whole family is there. But when people come to my house, not everybody is there.	When I see other families doing things together it reminds me of my Mom and Dads' separation. I wish they were not separated.	Reconciliation Wish, Adjustment Difficult
25. Like when I go to my cousins ... their whole family is there, mine isn't and I don't like that feeling.	Having my parents separated causes me to experience unpleasant feelings.	Pain
26. Sometimes my Mom and Dad we go out to dinner together but other then that we are all almost always by ourselves.	I feel lonely without my parents being together.	Loneliness
27. What really makes me mad is that they are separated and that is also sort of sad.	I feel angry and sad because Mom and Dad separated.	Anger, Grief

28. I think that everything is going well and I like that they are separated but not in one way, that it is, that it is sad.	To cope with my sadness, sometimes I have to deny my true feelings.	Grief, Denial
29. I would rather be with my whole family than just one. But if they are fighting, I feel good that they are separated.	I wish Mom and Dad were back together but I am glad that they do not fight any more.	Reconciliation Wish, Sense of Relief
30. But sometimes I don't feel good about the separation. I only know one person whose parents are separated and that's, there are two, there is a boy and a girl there four and six I think, and her parents are divorced but just when I heard my Mom say that they are separated, I thought bad because other little kids ... moms and dads are separated and I just don't really know.	Sometimes when I think about my situation and other kids whose parents are divorced, my feelings are confusing and this is hard for me to get used to.	Confusion, Adjustment Difficult
31. But what I am really mad at is that we can't get together any more really, cause we really don't go out for dinner altogether any more and that is what sort of makes me sad.	I feel angry and sad because we cannot do things as a family any more.	Anger, Grief
32. ...one time it was about midnight and I went to my Dad's room and he was ready for bed and I said, Dad how come you and Mom are separated and he said that he just, that he was fighting with my Mother, not exactly	It is hard for me to understand sometimes, why my Mom and Dad separated.	Adjustment Difficult, Helplessness

fighting but arguing.

33. Like when we gave our Christmas, we hugged each other and I saw a couple of tears come down from my Dad's eyes.	It was sad not to be able to have Christmas with both Mom and Dad together.	Grief, Need for Both Parents
34. ... my Mom is going to get a picture of my Dad for me that is going to get into my room but there is also another thing that reminds me is ... that night table over there, my Dad gave it to me.	Sometimes when I am at Mom's house, I think about my Dad and this makes me feel lonely.	Need for Both Parents, Loneliness
35. ... and then when I am at my Dad's house, is my grandparents. My Mom's mom and dad gave me a bookshelf and that can also remind me of my Mom.	Sometimes when I am at Dad's house, I think about my Mom and this makes me feel lonely.	Need for Both Parents, Loneliness
36. She used to fight and I think its more better that she doesn't fight because then she is probably going to get used to it and she is probably going to try and move back with my Dad because she and my Dad are talking again. But I think it will work out.	I am glad that my Mom doesn't fight with my Dad any more and I hope that she gets back together with him.	Sense of Relief, Reconciliation Wish
37. But that is only if, that's not for sure, because I never know what is in their minds.	I wish I could know for sure, what my Mom and Dad will do.	Helplessness
38. If has gotten better, well not really, in between, like sometimes I feel that my Mom started some fights and my Dad started some fights. So its not that my relationship is better with my Mom but it is in between.	Sometimes I feel confused about the way I feel. I love both of my parents a lot.	Confusion, Need for Both Parents

39. ...my Mom and my Dad were together again.	I want my Mom and Dad to be together.	Reconciliation Wish
40. Well I figure that she is maybe, but she has lots of friends ... she has lots of people she can talk to, but my Dad, my Dad doesn't have many friends that he has.	I worry that my Dad might be lonely sometimes. I am lonely without him.	Loneliness, Need for Both Parents
41. When we are at Moms ... he is going to get lonely right now because its no wonder he is really uncomfortable.	I worry that my Dad might be lonely sometimes. I am lonely without him.	Loneliness, Need for Both Parents
42. Because of the Fathers' Day present, I got him a card and ... it said on it, I am at Moms, I miss you, do you miss me? He wrote on it yes, and then two exclamation marks. So I think he is.	I worry that my Dad might be lonely sometimes. I am lonely without him.	Loneliness, Need for Both Parents
43. I have been, sort of been angry at myself because sometimes I started the fights. Like when my Mom shouts or something because I was really silly that time.	Sometimes I think that I may have been the cause of the problems between my Mom and Dad.	Self-Blame
44. Well, I don't really know because sometimes I am lonely but I can't really give you an example because I can't really remember the times that I am lonely.	My lonely feelings can be very painful. I try not to think about them.	Loneliness, Pain, Denial
45. Don't be worried ... don't be worried that they are going to get mad at you or something because they are divorced ... there is nothing to worry	I try not to worry about what is happening and I hope Mom and Dad get back together, but	Reconciliation Wish, Acceptance

about because I know that my Mom and Dad are probably going to get back together again. But you never know what will happen, God may give you a good chance or a bad chance.	part of me doubts this will ever happen.	
46. Like I am getting used to it already and I have been switching for about a year already, and it is already feeling good to me because they are not fighting any more.	As long as Mom and Dad continue not to fight, I think I can get used to the way my life is now.	Sense of Relief, Acceptance
47. Lots of people know ... I sort of wanted to keep it to myself but I just blah, blah, blah.	Even though I didn't want to, I found it hard not to tell my friends about my Mom and Dad separating.	Need for Others' Acceptance

Table 5

Second Order Thematic Abstraction of Amanda's Experience

Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1. Pain (6, 9, 24, 44)	Child experiences painful and scary feelings as a result of parental separation; a good deal of sadness is associated with the pain; experiences many unpleasant feelings; loneliness associated with post separation experiences is very painful.
2. Divided Loyalties (15, 16, 21)	Child experiences a heightened sense of awareness of parents' feelings; feels a need to please both parents; experiences a sense of not wanting to blame either parent for what has transpired; heightened awareness of love and need for each parent; does not like comparing one parent to the other.
3. Confusion (7, 11, 30, 38)	Sense of confusion is created about what is happening and how it will all turn out; experiences confusing feelings and has difficulty in accepting this.
4. Fear-Anxiety (1, 6, 13, 19, 20, 22)	Separation of her Mom and Dad has created uncertainty and fear; scary feelings prove to be quite painful; loss of security breeds fear; loneliness can be a very scary experience; worries about something happening to her absent parent; seems to be less worry associated with the security of pre-divorce family home.
5. Grief (8, 9, 27, 28, 31, 33)	Parental separation creates a good deal of sadness; grief is experienced as painful feelings and seems to endure; coping with sadness seem to cause some denial of true feelings; sadness seems related to anger about split in nuclear family; special times like Christmas prove to be especially distressing.
6. Loneliness (19, 20, 26, 34,	Child experiences loneliness as a scary feeling; experiences anxiety that

35, 40, 41, 42, 44)	something may happen to her absent parent; parental separation creates lonely feelings that seem to endure; thinking about absent parent is experienced as a longing for that parent; some projection of lonely feelings onto absent parent; lonely feelings can be very scary to her, creating some denial.
7. Helplessness (8, 32, 37)	Helplessness is experienced as a loss of control; child experiences an unfulfilled need to try and understand why parents separated; desires to know for sure, what lies ahead for her.
8. Need for Both Parents (3, 16, 21, 23, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41, 42)	Experiences a need to see parents still do things together; needs to share feelings with both parents; this need seems to heighten during special times like Christmas; need for both parents seems to be associated with a desire to ease pain from lonely feelings; expresses worry about how Dad is coping.
9. Self-Blame (17, 18, 43)	Child has the sense that she has caused the problems between her parents; at time, blames herself for parental conflict; experiences some self-directed anger.
10. Reconciliation Wish (2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 24, 29, 36, 39, 45)	Expresses a desire to have parents reconcile their differences and get back together; seeing other families together seems to heighten this desire for reconciliation; she maintains hope that her wishes will come true; however, part of her experience doubts that reconciliation is possible.
11. Sense of Relief (4, 7, 10, 11, 14, 29, 36, 46)	Child experiences a feeling of relief that her Mom and Dad no longer fight; cessation of overt hostilities between parents is experienced as a pleasant feeling; perceives ending of hostilities as offering hope for reconciliation.
12. Acceptance (5, 45, 46)	She acknowledges that there are some good things about Mom and Dad being separated; acknowledges self doubt related to

	reconciliation fantasies; admits that acceptance of separation may be easier because of reduced parental conflict.
13. Anger (27, 31)	There is a sense of anger experienced over parental separation; anger seems to be associated with sadness over dissolution of the nuclear family; some experience of self directed anger.
14. Adjustment Difficult (12, 20, 22, 24, 30, 32)	Child experiences difficulty in adjusting to life in two separate homes; difficulty experienced in accepting lonely and painful feelings; she worries about her absent parent; loss of security of nuclear family is troublesome; confusing feelings seem to cause a sense of ongoing distress; painful memories persist; continues to strive to understand why Mom and Dad separated.
15. Need for Others' Acceptance (47)	Although she expressed a desire to keep things to herself, there seemed to be a need fulfilled by sharing her feelings with others.
16. Denial (6, 28, 44)	Scary and painful feelings cause distress for child; denial seems to be used sometimes to cope with unpleasant realities; she tries not to dwell on loneliness created by parental absence; loneliness for absent parent seems to cause her to block out some unhappy realities.

A Synthesis of Amanda's Experience

Amanda's experiences of divorce and parental absence were predomiantly negative at this point in the divorcing process. With it only being slightly over a year since the separation of her Mom and Dad, she was experiencing many mixed emotions and the intensity of some of these experiences were clearly distressing for her.

Amanda was experiencing painful and scary feelings as a result of the parental separation. She offered that at times, she would go into her bedroom just to sit, think, and cry. She seemed to be still grieving over the separation of her Mom and Dad and found this sadness to be a painful experience in her life. When she spent time with her cousins, she would think about how it was like when her Mom and Dad were not separated. She seemed to spend a considerable amount of time and energy dwelling on the past and the way her life used to be before the parental separation.

The sadness that Amanda was feeling seemed to be an enduring experience at this point in her life. At times she experienced difficulty with the sadness and pain and this caused her to deny her true feelings in an effort to cope with her unpleasant experiences. Special occasions like birthdays and Christmas were not the same as they used to be but, instead, were experienced as another reminder of the parental separation and tended to evoke feelings of sadness.

The separation of her parents created a great deal

of uncertainty in her experience and subsequent anxiety and fear. The fear she experienced also proved to be a source of Amanda's denial towards the true nature of her feelings. Amanda's original family home prior to the separation of her Mom and Dad was perceived as a source of stability and security and partially, losing the security which this home represented, was very scary at times. She worried about her absent parent and expressed a fear that something might happen to one of them. Like her brother Stephen, she too experienced a fear that the separation may cause her to lose contact with her Dad. She also experienced a fear that something might happen to her Mom, an extension of her feeling that women are more vulnerable than men and cannot protect themselves as easily. She does offer the sense that the fear and anxiety she experiences is seemingly more tolerable when she is at her Dad's house. The familiarity and security of her Dad's house seem to help in her coping with her anxieties and fears.

The loneliness that Amanda is experiencing is very intense. This loneliness is a definite source of her fear and anxiety. Parental absence is very clearly connected to Amanda's experience of lonely feelings. Like the sadness that she was experiencing, her lonely feelings were enduring and distressful at this point in her life. She longs for her absent parent and the perceived stability of having a Mom and Dad who are not divorced. As she pines for her absent parent, she worries about how her parents are coping and in a sense, is projecting her lonely feelings onto her absent parent. Loneliness is a

painful experience and again one that causes some denial in an effort to cope with the intensity of her unpleasant experiences. During our follow up interview, she described this denial in her own simple but eloquent way. She placed one hand over each ear, as one would do in an attempt to block out sound and said that at times, it was like she needed to put up a shield in order to protect herself from all her negative or unpleasant feelings.

Amanda has experienced a sense of anger over the parental separation although these feelings do not appear to be overtly directed toward her parents. The anger seems to be associated with the sadness over the dissolution of her nuclear family. There is a definite sense that Amanda has directed some of her angry feelings towards herself, and by turning these feelings inward, she blames herself for the problems her parents are experiencing. She recalls a specific incident prior to the parental separation where she got mad because of all the hostility and conflict between her Mom and Dad. While they were arguing, she threw a tape cassette at her Mom. She felt very badly about the incident afterwards and tended to put herself down for this behavior. In her words, "I have been sort of angry at myself because sometimes I started the fights."

Amanda feels a sense of confusion as a result of the multitude of unpleasant feelings in her experience. With the many new changes physically and psychologically in her life she feels, in a sense, that her life is out of control. With the feeling that parts of her life are out of control, Amanda experiences a sense of helplessness.

She expresses a need to try to understand everything that is happening and how it will eventually all turn out. However at this point, this need to understand is an unfulfilled wish and one that seems to be eluding her.

Amanda has experienced a heightened sense of awareness towards her parents' feelings and is now more cautious with her behavior, as she tries to please both of her parents. She experiences a feeling of divided loyalties and within this experience, she adamantly avoids pla- cing blame on either of her parents for what has trans- pired. She expresses a very strong love for both of her parents and does not like comparing one parent to the other in terms of how they respond to her needs.

She experiences a strong need for both parents and a desire to still see them cooperate and be able to continue to do things together. She also experiences a need to maintain contact with her absent parent and to be able to share her feelings with both of her parents. Her expressed need for love and support from both parents is associated with a desire to help ease the intensity of her painful and lonely feelings. Knowing that she is able to maintain physical and psychological contact with her absent parent has created a new sense of security for her, despite all her anxieties and fears.

Amanda has found that the adjustments required on her part as a result of divorce and parental absence are at times very difficult to become accustomed to. She has obviously had difficulty in accepting her lonely and painful feelings and the anxiety and fear she experiences over parental absence. The confusion and uncertainty

have been difficult experiences for Amanda, causing her a considerable amount of on-going distress. As she struggles to understand, she finds the post divorce adjustment process rather onerous.

Reconciliation wishes were a strikingly apparent part of Amanda's experiences. She openly expressed a desire to have her parents reconcile their differences and get back together and strived to maintain hope that this would indeed become a reality. At one point in the interview when we were talking about her Mother, she stated that, "...she is probably going to try and move back with my Dad because she and my Dad are talking again." The first of her three wishes was that her Mom and Dad could be back together again. However, as if to protect herself from the unpleasant reality that reconciliation may not be possible, she harbours a shadow of a doubt by admitting that you never really know for sure what will happen.

Amanda experienced a need to share her feelings surrounding the separation with significant others in her life and to feel their acceptance of her. She admitted that at first she did not want to tell anyone about what had happened and felt ashamed and afraid to go to school. However, she found this hard and subsequently shared her experiences with many of her friends, relatives, as well as a teacher who she trusted at her school.

Despite all the negative feelings in Amanda's experience, she felt a sense of relief that her Mom and Dad were no longer fighting like they had prior to the separation. This cessation of overt hostilities between

her parents created a pleasant feeling in her experience but she also perceived this ending of hostilities and conflict as possibly offering hope that one day her parents could reconcile their differences and move back together again.

Amanda was able to acknowledge that despite her many negative experiences, there were some good things about her Mom and Dad being separated. She liked the idea of having two vacations, two birthdays, and two Christmas celebrations. Her acknowledgement of self-doubt related to her reconciliation fantasies seemed to indicate that she may be beginning to accept her situation for what it is. There is a sense in her experience that as long as her Mom and Dad continue not to fight and to cooperate, she can get used to the way her life is now. She demonstrated a great deal of courage and resolve to understand the many changes in her life brought about by the parental separation and hopefully, given time, she will overcome and master the many obstacles which she has been presented with.

Linda

Linda was seven years old when interviewed for this study and was nearing the completion of Grade Two. She had sandy colored long blond hair with natural curls and brown eyes. Linda had a charming smile and a warm, open personality. She enjoyed playing with dolls and had quite a collection, with each doll having its own name and apparently its own personality. She was involved in creative dance classes, took gymnastics, and loved to read. She was progressing satisfactorily in school and appeared to be well liked by her peers. Linda was two and half years old when her parents separated.

Linda was from a middle class background and her Mother had remained at home with her until the separation. Divorce proceedings between her parents were completed approximately one year after the initial separation. Due to economic necessity, her Mother returned to work full time and Linda was cared for by private sitters during working hours until she reached school age. Once in school, Linda attended a before and after school care program within her school.

Through custody mediation, Linda's parents were able to negotiate a joint custody settlement which initially saw her spending sixteen out of twenty-eight days with her Mother and the remaining twelve days with her Father. The parents would have Linda alternating weekends at each home. Weekdays would see Linda spending two days at each home for one week and the following week she would spend three days at her Mom's and one day at her Dad's. This lasted for about two years when her Mom and Dad decided

to alter their custody agreement so Linda would spend equal amounts of time with each parent. A typical pattern would see Linda spending Monday and Tuesday at her Mom's house and Wednesday and Thursday at her Dad's house, with weekends continuing to alternate. This pattern continues to this date. Linda's parents maintained a good deal of cooperation in sharing responsibilities and caring for her needs in the post divorce period.

While understandably apprehensive about participating in this, Linda quickly relaxed and seemed quite at ease in sharing her feelings related to the divorce. She proved to be a very articulate child who seemed to welcome the experience to share her feelings and provided many helpful examples with startling clarity. She seemed to be very aware of her feelings and needs related to her parents and the divorcing process.

Table 6

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Linda's Experience

Excerpts From Transcribed Interview	Paraphrased Meanings	Themes
1. I remember that Mommy and Daddy fighted sometimes but not very often.	The fighting bothered me.	Pain
2. I liked being with both of them at the same time ... it hurt my feelings to be with only one of them.	I feel split between two parents and this causes painful feelings for me.	Divided Loyalties, Pain
3. I felt a little bit sad and mad and a little bit happy for them that they weren't going to be fighting, ... like they were still going to see each other but they weren't going to have to get hurt or anything.	Sometimes I feel confused about how I really feel but I am glad that my Mom and Dad don't fight any more.	Confusion, Sense of Relief
4. I was afraid of having different things happen, like in one house there would by joyful things going on and in the other house there would be sad things going on, and worried things.	I am afraid of my unpleasant feelings and I worry about my Mommy and Daddy.	Fear-Anxiety
5. I was afraid of different feelings, I was afraid I wouldn't get used to them.	I was afraid I wouldn't get used to my feelings.	Fear-Anxiety
6. Well I was sad about the divorce. My Mom and Dad were trying to ignore it.	I felt sad and very much alone with my feelings.	Grief, Loneliness
7. I felt a little bit	I felt left out,	Loneliness,

like in those movies, it felt like I was left out cause everybody would be doing the moving and I would be sitting down and doing nothing.	alone and helpless.	Helplessness
8. It feels like when everybody else is ... when your friends are playing a wonderful game and you're too shy to ask if you could play and they are to greedy to let, to ask you if you want to play.	Sometimes I feel like I am left out. I need to feel loved by both my Mom and Dad and to feel like I am an important part of their lives.	Loneliness, Need for Both Parents
9. Well, I thought I was to blame cause...I thought my Mom and Dad, one of them wanted me and the other didn't and so they were kind of fighting over me.	I was blaming myself for what happened and I was worried that neither Mom or Dad wanted me.	Self-Blame, Fear-Anxiety
10. I thought that I shouldn't have been there at all, cause I was making them more angry.	I was blaming myself for Mom and Dad's problems.	Self-Blame
11. ...this was a long time ago ... not only when I was with my Mom but when I was with my Dad I was feeling sad cause I always wanted to be with the other person.	I was feeling sad because I felt like I was always missing one of my parents.	Grief, Loneliness
12. ...but when I was finally with that person I wanted to go to my Daddy and when I was at my Daddy's I wanted to go to my Mommy's.	I was in a situation where I was always missing one of my parents.	Loneliness, Adjustment Difficult
13. Cause I was used to being with both of them.	I would like them to be together.	Reconciliation Wish
14. Yuh ... cause I was	I would like them	Reconcili-

used to being with both my Mommy and Daddy.	to be together.	ation Wish
15. Well, not having them both to kiss you good night at the same time ... and not being able to see them everyday at the same time.	It has been hard getting used to my Mom and Dad being separated. Sometimes I feel like I am always missing one of them.	Loneliness, Adjustment Difficult
16. ...when one thing happened at one house, you had to wait to tell the person at the other house unless you called ... and another thing is I was always calling my Daddy when I learned his number and my Mommy made it so I could only call him once a day or once a week ... and that I didn't really like.	It is important for me to be able to share my feelings with both of my parents. I do not like to have restrictions placed on the contact I have with either of my parents.	Need for Both Parents
17. Well say if you just made a brand new picture and you think that ... my Daddy was always good at music and my Mommy wouldn't really enjoy that like as much as my Daddy ... so not being able to show them both cause I thought my Mommy would like it but my Daddy would like it even more.	Having my parents living in two separate homes makes it hard for me to share the important day to day things in my life.	Need for Both Parents, Adjustment Difficult
18. Well, number one they don't fight. Like they never used to one minute fight, two minute fight, three minutes another fight ... but they don't fight.	A good thing about Mom and Dad being separated is that they don't fight any more.	Sense of Relief
19. Sometimes ... I have something secret that I want to tell one of them and I like to speak aloud	I have grown to like the sense of privacy I now experience with	Acceptance

so they can hear me and if the other person were in the house then they would hear the secret.	both of my parents.	
20. Well ... the one that I like is being able to have a picture from school, a school picture at both houses, whereas if you have one school picture then say it gets lost then you have zero school pictures. But if you have one, like me, I have one at my Mommy's and one at my Daddy's. Then if one gets lost I still have the other one.	I feel like their are some advantages to having my parents living in two separate homes.	Acceptance
21. With both of my parents ... I used to be able to go to the park a lot, cause I didn't go to school, or kindergarten or anything. But now I can't cause I need to do different things.	I still think about the things I used to be able to do when Mom and Dad lived together.	Adjustment Difficult
22. Well this is before, not right now, but before I was mad cause I didn't like the idea of divorce. I wanted Mommy and Daddy to get back together.	I felt angry because my parents separated and I wanted them to get back together.	Anger, Reconciliation Wish
23. I thought that it was kind of like a game of tag and one person wasn't getting chased. The person who wasn't getting chased is mad ... I'm the person who wasn't getting chased.	I felt angry because my parents separated. I also felt left out and do not like this feeling.	Anger, Loneliness
24. Well ... I think about them when I'm at a birthday party ... I invited my Daddy cause I have one birthday party at my Mommy's, one birthday at	I still think about what it was like when Mom and Dad were together and sometimes I wish they were	Reconciliation Wish

my Daddy's ... and I invited my Daddy to the birthday party at my Mommy's and I thought about them being together when they were together there.	back together.	
25. After the divorce I got a lot of love and affection.	I needed my parents to support me through this hard time.	Need for Both Parents
26. Well, to be in a house with two levels and then to go to a house with three ... I just find it a little bit different than ... in a three levelled house there's three floors and there's more room to have your freedom.	I found it hard adjusting to Mom and Dad each living in their own house.	Adjustment Difficult
27. Well I find it different. In one house the staircase ... you have to go across the living room and in the other house you have to go across it and go up to get to the upstairs.	I found it hard adjusting to Mom and Dad each living in their own house.	Adjustment Difficult
28. Yuh. I think about my Mommy and when I'm at my Mommy's house I think about my Daddy.	I think about my absent parent quite a bit.	Loneliness
29. Sometimes when my Mom or Dad will usually say ... that I'm going ... say I'm at my Daddy's and my Mommy will say you're going to your Daddy's then I start to think of my Daddy. Then when my Daddy says I'm going to my Mommy's then I start to think of my Mommy.	Being with one parent can be a reminder of not being with the other parent.	Loneliness

30. ...for instance like when my guinea pig died, I thought about it, and I thought about Daddy and I put these words in my head. I said Daddy I need to tell you that Winky died. And so sometimes I think about them when I'm trying to remember something to tell them.	Sometimes my experiences can cause me to think about my absent parent. Sometimes I feel lonely and would like to talk to the parent that I am not with.	Loneliness, Need for Both Parents, Adjustment Difficult
31. Well, as an example, when I'm on holidays, say I'm going on holidays for about two weeks and when I'm on holidays about in the middle of the first week and the second week then I really miss the person who I'm not with.	When I'm away from one parent for a long time I find I miss that person a lot.	Adjustment Difficult, Loneliness
32. I kind of seem to feel a little bit guilty ... a little bit like the blame is on me ... for forgetting about Mommy. I thought that, I still think it a little bit now but not as much.	Sometimes I feel bad when I have not been thinking about my absent parent.	Self-Blame, Divided Loyalties
33. My Mommy I talk to a little bit of the time and my Daddy I talk to a little bit too.	I need to be able to talk to both of my parents.	Need for Both Parents
34. The reason she is looking for a boyfriend is she is lonely ... cause she is lonely when I'm not with her.	I think Mommy is lonely. I am sometimes lonely without Mommy.	Loneliness
35. I find him a little bit lonely, cause he calls me sometimes and says that he's missing me.	Daddy is lonely without me and sometimes I am lonely without him.	Loneliness
36. All I want is a little brother or sister.	I want a family that is back	Reconciliation Wish

	together.	
37. I sometimes think I'm a little bit lonely ... when my Daddy, he sometimes sleeps and then I get a little lonely then ... but basically all the other times I'm not lonely at all ... I'm with another parent.	Since Mom and Dad separated, there are times when I feel lonely.	Loneliness
38. Well ... it took about four or five years to get used to it ... but I'm fine now.	It took me a long time to be able to start to feel okay about my situation.	Adjustment Difficult, Acceptance
39. Well that it would hurt for the first two years, two or three years, that they would miss the person longer than for the first two years to three years.	My experience of divorce has caused me to experience many painful feelings and these are hard to get used to.	Pain, Adjustment Difficult
40. There might be a situation where they'd be together and they go from their Mom's house to their Daddy's and there might be a situation where they would only be with their Mommy, and there might be one where they would only be with their Daddy.	My experience of divorce has been hard to get used to. Divorce can be very complicated for children.	Adjustment Difficult
41. ...that person may still love them ... and that I know a girl, she's in grade 4 in my school, her name is Jana, and she doesn't know her Dad so I can tell them that they really do have a Dad cause she says that she doesn't have a Dad, but you, there is one person in the whole	Having a Mom and Dad who love me is a very important part of my life.	Need for Both Parents

world who is your Dad. There is one person who is your real Mom.		
42. ... say they're staying with their Dad and their Mom gets married again ... that they might not like, like they don't have the exact same taste as their parents, they are seldom the same.	I do not have to like what my parents do. My needs are distinct from my parents needs.	Acceptance
43. Yes ... cause a lot of my friends don't have their parents divorced ... my best friend, her name is Tahnis, she doesn't have her parents divorced, and I was scared that she was going to tease me about not having both my parents together.	I need others to show an acceptance of my situation.	Need for Others' Acceptance
44. ... they just told me that my Mom and Dad still would be able to get together sometimes but that they weren't going to be together all the time ... they helped me know that I'll be able to see both of them.	I need to share my feelings with my friends.	Need for Others' Acceptance
45. ... when I said my guinea pig died I went and I told my Daddy and I started to cry cause I hadn't got all the sadness out and my Daddy helped me.	I need to be able to share my feelings with both of my parents.	Need for Both Parents

Table 7

Second Order Thematic Abstraction of Linda's Experience

Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1. Pain (1, 2, 39)	Memories of parental conflict are experienced as painful for the child; a sense of being split between two parents causes anguish; experiences a deep sense of hurt; painful experiences are associated with sadness and loneliness; painful feelings are difficult to get used to.
2. Divided Loyalties (2, 32)	Child experiences a sense of being split between two parents; experiences a painful sense of guilt for not thinking about her absent parent.
3. Confusion (3)	Expresses a sense of confusion about how she really feels; a wealth of unpleasant feelings help to create confusion.
4. Fear-Anxiety (4, 5, 9)	Child experiences a fear of distressful feelings; worries about her absent parent; afraid she couldn't get used to experiencing unpleasant feelings associated with Mom and Dad's separation; expresses a fear that neither parent would want her.
5. Grief (6, 11)	Separation of Mom and Dad causes a deep sense of sadness; associated with painful feelings; sadness clearly connected to loneliness; parental absence causes a good deal of on-going distress for the child.
6. Loneliness (6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 37)	Experiences a sense of being left alone to cope with her painful feelings; this creates a feeling of helplessness; experiences a longing for her absent parent; has difficulty in adjusting to lonely feelings; experiences a sense that being with one parent can act as a reminder of not being with the absent parent; related to a strongly felt need

	for both parents; at times it seems she projects her lonely feelings onto her parents; seems to be an enduring experience for the child.
7. Helplessness (7)	Child experiences a sense of being unsure of how to cope with unpleasant feelings; feels left out and alone with her feelings.
8. Need for Both Parents (8, 16, 17, 25, 30, 33, 41, 45)	Expresses a strong need to feel loved by both parents; she wants to be an important part of parents' lives; seems to be a connection with self-esteem; child experiences a desire to be able to share feelings with both of her parents; she needs to feel some control over when she can contact her absent parent; parental support needed to cope with painful feelings; associated with easing sense of loneliness.
9. Self-Blame (9, 10, 32)	There is a sense of feeling like she is the cause of parental conflict; her parents' fighting over her tends to reinforce this idea; experiences a sense of guilt associated with not thinking about her absent parent.
10. Reconciliation Wish (13, 14, 22, 24, 36)	Child expresses a desire to be with both of her parents; she wants her parents to be back together; maintains memories of when Mom and Dad were together.
11. Sense of Relief (3, 18)	Expresses a relief that Mom and Dad don't fight any more; reduced parental conflict leaves her with a sense that parents won't hurt each other any more.
12. Acceptance (19, 20, 38, 42)	She has come to appreciate a new found sense of privacy experienced with each parent; child feels like there are some advantages to living in two separate homes; recalls a lengthy period of adjustment before acceptance becomes a reality; has come to appreciate that her needs are separate and distinct from her parents' needs.

13. Anger (22, 23)	Parental separation appears to be a source of anger towards her parents; she also experiences some degree of self-directed anger.
14. Adjustment Difficult (12, 15, 17, 21, 26, 27, 30, 31, 38, 39, 40)	Acknowledges that loneliness for her absent parent is a difficult experience to get used to; experiences difficulty in adjusting to living in two home; finds it hard to let go of memories of pre-divorce nuclear family; offers the sense that adjustment takes a long time; has experienced difficulty in learning to cope with her painful feelings.
15. Need for Others' Acceptance (43, 44)	Child expresses a desire to have others show acceptance of her situation; expresses a need to share her feelings with others; seems to be a connection to self-esteem.

A Synthesis of Linda's Experience

It is evident from Linda's perception of divorce and parental absence that there were both positive and negative responses in her experience of the phenomenon being investigated. It had been almost five years since Linda's parents had separated and as a result, she had a great deal of time to experience the many physical and psychological changes inherent in the divorcing process.

Linda seemed to recall very little about what it was actually like when her Mom and Dad used to live together and given her age at the time of the parental separation, this was not surprising. She did have vague recollections that there was a great deal of fighting and hostility in the pre-divorce period and that this conflict had undoubtedly bothered her and caused considerable distress in her young life.

Linda's initial experiences of divorce and parental absence appeared to be very painful and included feelings of sadness, loneliness, confusion, fear, anger, and anxiety. As she recalls, the experiences of these unpleasant feelings seemed to cause her a great deal of confusion. She expressed a definite sense of feeling split between two parents and this caused her to experience a considerable amount of anguish.

Linda expressed a fear of the overwhelming nature of her unpleasant feelings. She was clearly afraid that she wouldn't be able to get used to her feelings. In her words, "I was afraid of different feelings, I was afraid I wouldn't get used to them." There seemed to be a good

deal of conflict in the immediate post-divorce period over the custody of Linda and this instilled a lot of fear in her. She was afraid that neither of her parents wanted her and the fighting seemed to reinforce this belief in her experience.

There is a sense that Linda felt angry at her Mom and Dad for separating and subsequently divorcing. This anger seems to have been directed towards both of her parents in a covert manner, as well as turned inward upon herself. She offers the sense that she felt responsible for some of the conflict between her parents and again, her parents' fighting over her, seemed to reinforce this belief. She felt that she shouldn't have been there at all because she was the one who was making them angry. Linda also experienced a sense of guilt as a result of parental absence. When she was away from one of her parents, she would experience a feeling of guilt for not thinking about that parent.

Linda experienced a sense of being left alone to cope with her unpleasant feelings creating a feeling of helplessness for her. She seemed to experience a longing for her absent parent and has obviously experienced some difficulty in adjusting to her lonely feelings. The loneliness from parental absence created an experience where she felt like her loyalties were divided between her two parents and this proved to be a difficult experience for Linda. With her parents living in two homes, it was like a "no win" situation. She was always missing her absent parent and when her need for that parent was fulfilled, she would experience a need for the parent she

had just left. In a very real sense, she felt like she was split between her two parents. At times, being with one parent obviously acted as a reminder that she was not with her absent parent and the loneliness that this created was very difficult. Like the other children in this study, Linda felt like her absent parent was lonely without her and seemed to project her lonely feelings onto her absent parent. The loneliness created by parental absence seems to be an enduring experience for Linda.

Reconciliation fantasies were also a very real part of her experience. She rationalized that she had been used to being with both of her parents and wanted this to continue. While she seemed to have very little recollection of specific memories prior to the divorce, she strived to maintain some sense of what life was like when her Mom and Dad were together. When her parents would get together for special occasions like her birthday, this seemed to fuel Linda's hope that maybe reconciliation was a possibility. In her words, "I still think about what it was like when Mom and Dad were together and sometimes I wish they were back together."

Linda openly acknowledges that the adjustment process which she has faced as a result of divorce has been very difficult. The loneliness created by parental absence has at times proved to be onerous in her experience. She found that living in two homes made it very difficult to share important day to day experiences with her parents. There seemed to be a sense that the physical differences between her residences had been a source of concern. She has found it hard to let go of memories

from her past and accept her new situation for what it is. She offers that while she has come to accept certain aspects of her life in a divorced family, this has taken her a great deal of time.

Linda expresses a very strong need to feel loved and supported physically and psychologically, by both of her parents. She wants to be an important part of their lives and be able to share her feelings with both parents. Undue restrictions placed on her contact with her absent parent are certainly frowned upon. Her need for both parents seems to be connected to her development of a positive self-esteem. She feels that her parents have provided a lot of necessary love and affection and that this has helped her in coming to grips with the changes in her life. She acknowledges that the parental support which she has received has helped her to cope with her painful experiences and to ease her feelings of loneliness.

Linda shows definite signs that she has come to accept certain aspects of her situation despite all of her negative experiences. She has come to appreciate a new found sense of privacy experienced with each parent and feels like there are some advantages to living in two homes. Apparently Linda has virtually two sets of everything from clothes to toys, one at each home and as she indicates, this can be advantageous. Through her acceptance and encouragement from her parents, Linda has come to appreciate that her needs are separate and distinct from her parents and this has helped her to establish her own sense of identity within her divorced family structure.

Linda feels that it has been important for her to share her feelings with her friends and to feel their acceptance. She was worried that her friends would tease her because her Mom and Dad were divorced and when this did not happen, she was relieved.

While her experiences indicate that she has adapted to some of the changes brought about by divorce, parental absence does still evoke a lingering feeling of loneliness While she reflected upon her past it was evident that her experiences were filled with many trials and tribulations which, unquestionably, required resourcefulness and energy in order to begin to develop a sense of mastery. She left me with the impression that mastery does not come easily but it can be achieved given proper support and time.

Jenney

Jenny was nine years old when interviewed for this study and had recently completed Grade Four. She was a fairly tall child with medium length brown hair and captivating green eyes. She had a very good sense of humour and enjoyed showing me a rather remarkable magic trick where she created the illusion of bending and then re-straightening a metal spoon. Jenney was involved in jazz dancing and synchronized swimming. Her progress in school was age appropriate developmentally and she seemed to be well liked by her classmates. She was four and half years old when her parents separated and divorce proceedings were completed approximately one year later.

Jenney came from a middle class background where both of her parents worked at full time jobs. Prior to her parents' separation, Jenney attended day care during her parents' working hours. This continued after the parental separation and once in school, Jenney's care was in an after school care program in the school which she attended. There seemed to be a great deal of cooperation between her parents in relation to caring for Jenney's needs in the post-divorce period.

Through custody mediation, Jenny's parents were able to agree on a joint custody settlement which saw Jenney spending approximately equal amounts of time with both of her parents. This form of the custody agreement began shortly after the initial separation and continues to

this date. A typical pattern would see Jenney alternating weekends at her parents' homes, with weekdays divided so that Jenney would usually spend two days at each home. While the custody agreement seemed to have a relatively stable structure, there was also a good deal of flexibility to accommodate for unanticipated changes and the work schedules of her parents.

As with the other children in this study, Jenney was quite nervous at the beginning of the semi-structured interview. However, she was able to relax and seemed quite at ease in sharing her feelings and experiences related to divorce. Like Amanda and Linda, Jenney seemed to welcome the opportunity to share her experiences and provided some metaphorical examples which proved to be very beneficial in describing her experiences. Like Linda, she seemed to be very aware of her feelings and needs related to her parents and the divorcing process. She seemed particularly at ease during our final meeting, where we discussed the essential structure of her experiences.

Table 8

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Jenney's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrased Meanings	Themes
1. Mom and Dad got divorced because they didn't love each other any more, they just didn't love each other any more, it was both of them.	Mom and Dad got divorced because they didn't love each other any more. Neither one was really to blame.	Acceptance, Divided Loyalties
2. I don't remember ... I don't remember who said, well we are getting divorced and I don't remember, but I probably cried.	I have a hard time remembering exactly how the divorce happened but I do remember that it was a sad time for me.	Grief
3. I think that maybe I was a bit mad, but I don't really remember all that well.	I think I did feel some anger when Mom and Dad first divorced.	Anger
4. I stayed in the same house for about six months, but my Dad moved into an apartment building and when he moved away, I stayed with my Mom.	It was a sad time when my Dad first moved out.	Grief
5. ... we moved into a townhouse, it was way down there, it wasn't by here at all ... it was kind of like an apartment building and it was okay ... since then, Mom has moved four times but my Dad has moved only once.	At times, I found it hard getting used to all the moving that my Mom had to do.	Adjustment Difficult
6. But my Dad, he should move because it is so small, he is always saying that he's going to move	I wish my Dad would move to a bigger space. Sometimes I feel	Frustration

but he never does ... its too small and he has lots of stuff and its bad you know that he has one bedroom and one bathroom ... very small kitchen and medium sized living room.	frustrated because we don't have enough room at my Dad's house.	
7. Well, he sleeps on the cot and I sleep on the bed ... we share a bedroom ... he stays up until like 11:00, so like he is too tired to switch me into the cot.	Sometimes I feel frustrated because we don't have enough room at my Dad's house.	Frustration
8. I have a couple of toys but he keeps on telling me to bring them over to my Moms because there is too much junk. I have this humungous polar bear, its that big and that wide, its really big and I sleep with it every night and he always says, why do you need that? Its just a little bit too crowded at my Dad's.	Sometimes I feel frustrated because we don't have enough room at my Dad's house. I wish we could have more space.	Frustration
9. I don't think anybody was really to blame, when Mom and Dad first split up.	I love both of my parents and I can't blame either one for what has happened.	Divided Loyalties, Need for Both Parents
10. As long as its not for too long, I'm fine ... like two summers ago, he went to Greece for two weeks and that was too long ... he gave me this hanger which you put on clothes and that was the last thing that he gave me, so I kept it on my bed.	I've gotten used to being away from my absent parent because I know I'll see them again soon. I miss them if they are gone for a long time.	Acceptance, Need for Both Parents, Loneliness
11. Same with my Mom, as	I've gotten used	Acceptance,

long as its not too long ... but most of the time if she goes anywhere, she usually would take me with her, unless like, she goes practically every week to the North for two days and that is okay.	to being away from my absent parent because I know I'll see them again soon.	Need for Both Parents
12. Sometimes it bothers me to go back and forth because, like, sometimes I feel like a ball bouncing back and forth.	Going back and forth between two homes can sometimes be confusing.	Confusion, Adjustment Difficult
13. Yeah, but it doesn't like bug me too much, because I am with my Dad almost every week because my Mom goes up north and I am with my Mom the rest of the week and I stay with my Dad every two weekends.	Its confusing sometimes but you can get used to it. I need to be able to spend time with both of my parents, so its kind of a trade off.	Confusion, Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
14. Like the ball doesn't bug me, its just that it doesn't stop and I'm glad it doesn't stop because if it stopped then I wouldn't see one of my parents for a long time.	I have learned to get used to my situation. I love both of my parents and need to see and feel loved by them.	Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
15. If I couldn't see one of my parents for a long time, I would miss them sort of, I kinda would miss them.	Being without one of my parents for a long time can cause me to feel lonely.	Loneliness
16. They both wanted to get a divorce because they didn't love each other any more.	Mom and Dad got divorced because they didn't love each other any more. Neither one was really to blame.	Acceptance, Divided Loyalties
17. Like there's a fight always once, always once in a marriage there is a	Its a good feeling to see that Mom and Dad	Sense of Relief, Acceptance

fight, but now they don't fight any more, they get along as friends.	can still cooperate even though they are divorced.	
18. I can't stay at home like right after school, I can't come home and expect her to be there. I have to wait for two hours and then she comes home. Or we used to, we always used to bake and we don't any more.	Even though I think I have accepted my Mom and Dad's divorce, there are still some things that are hard to get used to.	Acceptance, Adjustment Difficult
19. Well, what I do if my Mom is home ... then what I do after school is I come right home and sit and watch T.V. and I phone my Mom as soon as I get home and she says whether I have any chores to do or not and then I just watch T.V. and wait for her.	Sometimes I feel a little bit lonely if I am at home without one of my parents.	Loneliness
20. When my Dad has to pick me up, like, I am usually one of the last ones at the aftercare because he works and I am hoping next year that I can get out of the aftercare because I don't like it.	I don't like it when I have to stay late in the aftercare. I hope this will change soon.	Frustration
21. Well, I don't know because we do lots of stuff. Like he flies our kite and we hang around at the mall and look at all the stores and watch television.	I love my Dad a lot and need to be able to spend time with him.	Need for Both Parents
22. I don't know if it's better, because sometimes it's okay and sometimes it isn't ... and the same with my Mom.	Sometimes I feel a little confused about how I really feel.	Confusion

23. Well, I don't know because they do some stuff that I don't like and they do some stuff that I do like but the most thing that I think about for both my Mother and Father is that they sometimes embarrass me.	I love both my Mom and my Dad but that does not mean that I have to like what my parents do.	Acceptance
24. ... well one you have all of your clothes and toys like here for instance and then at my Dad's house, I do have clothes and everything but I don't have my own room and I don't have ... all my toys there and I don't have all my clothes there.	It has been hard getting used to living in two homes. A lot of times I feel like I am missing something and this can be a source of frustration for me.	Adjustment Difficult, Frustration
25. Like my Nintendo or one of my tapes or something but then I give him a call and then I say, can you give me or bring me this or that.	Sometimes its hard getting used to living in two separate homes. Dad helps me with this by bringing me things I have forgotten.	Adjustment Difficult
26. Well my Mom, no she won't because she doesn't go over to my Dad's house, rarely, like once in a blue moon, so if I want something from my Mom's house, I just say, oh well! Because she never goes over there unless she drops me off.	Sometimes its hard getting used to living in two separate homes. At times, I wish my Mom would bring me things, like my Dad does.	Adjustment Difficult, Frustration
27. He comes over here and picks me up and he comes over here and drops off my clothes and he comes over here all the time.	I need my Dad a lot. Sometimes I wish Mom would come over to Dads, as often as he comes over to her house.	Divided Loyalties

28. Yeah, like I phone them every night and say good night to them and if I am at my Mom's house then I say good night to my Dad.	When I am away from either of my parents, I sometimes feel like I miss them.	Loneliness
29. I like it, its okay because they always ask me this question. Like my Mom always says if you want to live with your Dad for a couple of weeks, its okay with my Mom and that's what my Dad says too and so I'm kind of glad to hear that.	Mom and Dad help me to feel comfortable with my situation. They let me feel like I have some control over what is happening and that gives me a good feeling.	Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
30. When, like my Mom goes up north, I stay with my Dad and when my Mom comes back, I stay with her for the rest of the week ... if its my Dad's weekend to have me, then he picks me up and he keeps me until Wednesday and then I go over to my Moms.	I have gotten used to my schedule the way it is and I've grown to like it because I know when I am going to be able to see each of my parents.	Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
31. ... like if I really want something and I am really thinking about it, I would think of her. But if me and my Dad were doing something then I wouldn't be because we were doing something and my mind would be on something else.	I don't spend a lot of time thinking about my absent parent. I have gotten used to the way my life is.	Acceptance
32. Yeah, I phone my Dad and say look, good night, and see you in the morning and then I do see him.	I need to be able to contact my Mom or Dad whenever I feel the need.	Need for Both Parents
33. Well, I do remember it, but I just don't think about it a lot.	Since I have come to accept the way my life is, I don't spend much time thinking	Acceptance

	about the past.	
34. Yeah, I think Mom is happy right now. She loves her job but it is a bit tiring for her and I think Dad is pretty happy too ... I feel pretty happy with the way it is.	Mom and Dad are pretty happy now and this makes it easier for me to be happy.	Acceptance
35. Well yeah, but I never used to have fights with her, so it hasn't really changed. It hasn't really gotten worse ... and that's the same with my Dad.	I have a good relationship with both of my parents.	Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
36. I would change it by my Mom and Dad living in a hot place ... but I don't know whether I'd want them to live in separate homes, or together.	Part of me still kind of wishes that they could be together even though I don't think it will ever happen.	Reconciliation Wish, Acceptance
37. Yeah, sometimes I think that Dad is lonely, lonely for someone ... yeah, maybe Mom is lonely sometimes too.	I think sometimes Mom and Dad miss me and I sometimes miss them too.	Loneliness
38. I have lots of friends, well I have no friends around Dad's because he is in an apartment but I do have lots of friends that live around here.	When you live in two different homes, sometimes its hard to see your friends.	Adjustment Difficult
39. If I had to pick between easy or hard, I would say both because it was hard in a way and now its pretty easy.	Getting used to Mom and Dad divorcing was not easy, but now that I feel like I am used to it, its okay.	Adjustment Difficult, Acceptance
40. Well, I would tell	In divorce, its	Need for

them that their parents love them and whatever they do, they won't they'll still love them and it was none of the parents' fault and in the end, everything will work out fine.	important to know that your parents still love you. When you feel their love, its easier to get used to divorce.	Both Parents, Acceptance
41. No, I would tell them that ... I guess your parent who didn't want to see them any more was a pretty bad parent but you and whoever you are with will work out fine.	I think its important to not blame yourself for what happens between your parents.	Acceptance
42. ... like when they first probably divorced, I probably thought that this was terrible but it really wasn't. It was kind of good because if they would have stayed together, they would not have loved each other any more and they probably would fight or something.	In the beginning, my parents divorcing was painful. As I got through the pain and got used to their divorce, I came to realize that maybe they were better off apart and at least I could still see both of them.	Pain, Acceptance, Need for Both Parents
43. ... and I wish for my Mom and Dad to be happy.	I love my Mom and Dad and want them to be happy, so I can be happy.	Acceptance

Table 9

Second Order Thematic Abstraction of Jenney's Experience

Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1. Pain (42)	Child expresses that she has only vague recollections of initial parental separation and specific incidences of feelings associated with this; some sense exists that this was undoubtedly a terrible and painful time.
2. Divided Loyalties (1, 9, 16, 27)	Expresses a strong love for each parent and offers that neither parent was really to blame for parental separation; expresses a desire to have each parent respond to her needs in a similar manner.
3. Confusion (12, 13, 22)	Feelings of confusion are sometimes experienced when having to move back and forth between two separate homes; offers sense that while it can be confusing, it is something that she has become accustomed to; some confusion experienced as to how she really feels.
4. Grief (2, 4)	Child again expresses only vague recollections of initial separation period and specific feelings associated with this; offers perception that initially parental separation was a sad experience particularly when Dad first moved out.
5. Loneliness (10, 15, 19, 28, 37)	Child seems to have grown accustomed to loneliness resulting from parental absence; however, long time periods away from her absent parent can still prove to be difficult for her; parental work schedules can create a sense of loneliness; while accustomed to loneliness brought about by parental absence, she does not deny that the feelings at times seem to endure; some projection of lonely feelings onto parents.

6. Need for Both Parents (9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 21, 29, 30, 32, 35, 42)	Expresses a strong sense of love for both parents; expresses appreciation of parental support through post-separation period; gives a sense that parental absence is acceptable because of continuity established in contact with both parents; expresses a definite need to see and feel loved by both parents; seems to be associated with self-esteem; parents allow her to feel some control over contact with her absent parent; has maintained a good relationship with both of her parents.
7. Reconciliation Wish (36)	Acknowledges that a small part of her still wishes that Mom and Dad could be together; at the same time, she acknowledges accepting that this will probably never happen.
8. Sense of Relief (17)	Child experiences a good feeling in seeing cooperation between her Mom and Dad.
9. Acceptance (1, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 23, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43)	Appears to have accepted the cause of parents' divorce as resulting from a lack of love between Mom and Dad; offers sense that parental absence is acceptable because of consistency established in parental contact; continued parental support and love assists her in accepting her situation; establishing sense of her own identity; does not dwell on parental absence or past experiences; perception of Mom and Dad being happy allows her to feel happy; still maintains a very positive relationship with both parents; acknowledges that reconciliation wishes are not realistic; feels it is important to avoid self-blame for parental problems; accepts that Mom and Dad are probably better off apart; desires happiness for herself and her parents.
10. Anger (3)	Child again expresses only vague recollections of initial post-separation period and specific feelings associated with this; offers sense that anger was an experience which she felt during post-separation period.

11. Adjustment Difficult (5, 12, 18, 24, 25, 26, 38, 39)	Child acknowledges that it was difficult getting used to frequent moving; going back and forth between two separate homes is hard to get used to; had difficulty adjusting to new routines and changes in parental relationships; experiences a sense of frustration in having her belongings in two homes; life in two homes makes it difficult in maintaining contact with her friends; offers sense that adjustment to divorce was not an easy process.
12. Frustration (6, 7, 8, 20, 24, 26)	She experiences a sense of frustration over lack of space in Dad's apartment; feels crowded at times and desires more room; feels frustration with after school care arrangement; sense of forgetting important items in transition between homes is a source of frustration.

A Synthesis of Jenney's Experience

Jenney's experience of divorce and parental absence contained both negative and positive experiences in the phenomenological thematic analysis of her data. Her parents had separated and divorced approximately five and half years ago, consequently allowing her the longest time period of all the children in this study to experience the many changes which are brought about by the divorcing process.

While she expressed that she had only vague recollections of the initial parental separation and specific incidents or feelings associate with the early post-divorce period, she was aware that it was a very unpleasant experience in her life. She expressed her feelings towards her earliest experiences by stating, "...like when they first divorced, I probably thought that this was terrible..." Jenney acknowledges that the divorce caused painful feelings and that her early experiences of parental absence and divorce were filled with sadness, particularly when her Dad first moved out. While she can't recall specific memories she admits that the grief experienced over the separation of her parents was a difficult experience. She offers the sense that within her painful and sad experiences in the initial divorcing period, there was a feeling of anger. While aware of the experience of this feeling, she was not clear about the actual source of this anger and whether it was directed

towards her parents or turned inward upon herself.

From the outset, Jenny was involved in a joint custody arrangement which saw her moving back and forth between two homes. This created a considerable amount of confusion for her and she likened this experience to a ball which is bouncing back and forth and never stops bouncing. However, she concedes that the confusion has become acceptable because she is still able to maintain consistent contact with both of her parents. She used her bouncing ball analogy in a rather candid manner, by claiming that she was glad in a way that the ball never stopped bouncing because, if it did, that would mean that she might lose contact with one of her parents and this would be unacceptable to her.

Parental absence in Jenney's life seems to remain an experience that is filled with loneliness but again, an experience that she has grown accustomed to primarily because of the consistency established in her custody schedule. She readily admits that long periods of parental absence due to vacation times, or whatever reasons, can continue to evoke feelings of loneliness which still prove to be difficult to get used to. In her words, "If I couldn't see one of my parents for a long time, I would miss them sort of, I would kind of miss them." She also concedes that parental absence even for short periods of time can cause feelings of loneliness in her experience. She has established a habit where she always phones her absent parent at bedtime, to say goodnight. By doing this, and having her parents support her in this effort, she has developed her own mechanism for coping with the

loneliness brought about by parental absence and divorce. She believes that her parents miss her when she is away from them, as she misses them during these periods. In a sense, she is projecting her lonely feelings onto her absent parent. While she appears to have grown accustomed to the loneliness caused by divorce and parental absence, there appears to be a rather striking sense that her loneliness is an enduring experience.

While divided loyalties do not seem to be a significant problem in Jenney's experience, they nonetheless exist. When asked if she felt like either parent was to blame for the parental separation and divorce, she adamantly opposed this notion and became very protective of both parents, insisting that neither one could shoulder the blame for the divorce. She has rationalized in her own mind that the divorce resulted because her parents, in sense, fell out of love. In her mind, they simply did not love each other any more. She seems to possess a desire to please both parents and also expressed an avidity to have both of her parents respond to her needs in a similar manner.

Jenney acknowledges that the adjustment process she faced as a result of the many changes inherent in the divorcing process has presented many obstacles in her physical and psychological development. Adjusting to these changes has not been easy. She has experienced difficulty in adjusting to some of the changes in her lifestyle and parental relationships. While her Father had moved only once since the divorce, her Mother had moved a number of times and Jenney found this difficult.

She also feels like the divorce has altered the way she spends time with her Mom and wishes she could spend more time doing special things together, like baking. As mentioned, the experience of loneliness created by parental absence can prove to be a formidable obstacle although it is one which she seems to have accepted.

Moving back and forth between her Mom's house and her Dad's house, causes some concern for Jenney as she experiences a sense that she is always forgetting or wanting one of her possessions which remain in the absent parent's home. She also experiences a feeling that living in two homes can be difficult in developing and maintaining friendships. In her perception, the moving back and forth between two homes sometimes acted as a restrictive incursion on her contact with her friends.

Closely related to Jenney's feelings that her adjustment has not been an easy process are lingering feelings of frustration associated with certain aspects of her life. While she loves the contact and time spent with her Dad, she feels like his apartment is too crowded and wishes that they could have more space. In her transition between her Mom's house and her Dad's house she often forgets important items like one of her tapes or some of clothing and this causes a sense of frustration for her. Often, if she forgets something while at her Mom's house, her Dad will bring it to her. However, if she is at her Dad's house and forgets something at Mom's, she is hesitant to ask her Mom to bring her whatever it is she desires and this causes frustration in Jenney's experience.

Jenney very clearly expresses a strong need for both of her parents and appreciates the parental support she has received throughout the post-separation and divorce period. She expresses a definite need to see and feel loved by both parents and the consistency in the contact she has received has seemingly enhanced her self-esteem. She has been able to maintain a very positive relationship with both of her parents. Her parents have allowed her to feel some control over her contact with her absent parent and this has been very beneficial in helping Jenney to accept her situation for what it is.

Jenney acknowledges that a small part of her entertains reconciliation fantasies where she wishes that her Mom and Dad could still be together. However, she also acknowledges that this will probably never happen and that the divorce has in some ways been a good thing.

Jenney experiences a sense of relief, or a good feeling, because of the cooperation her parents have developed in meeting her needs. She has accepted many aspects of her life since the divorce and this appears to be largely because of the cooperation between her parents. As mentioned, she offers the sense that parental absence has become acceptable because of the consistency she experiences in her contact with both of her parents. She has accepted and internalized a reason or cause for the divorce without having to place blame on anyone. Through her acceptance and continued love and support from her parents, she is clearly beginning to develop her own identity and displays a very positive sense of self-esteem.

The control her parents have allowed her to feel in her contact with her absent parent has undoubtedly helped her to accept her situation. She no longer dwells on the past and the way life used to be. She has a definite sense that her Mom and Dad are happier since the divorce and this has allowed her to feel more content in her own life. Jenney has accepted that her Mom and Dad are better off apart and expresses a genuine desire for happiness for herself and her parents.

Table 10

Definitions of All Second Order Themes Across All Children

1. Pain: Divorce is a painful experience where children experience a multitude of negative or unpleasant feelings. The intensity of the negative feelings upsets a child's normal emotional state of equilibrium causing an on-going sense of distress.

2. Divided Loyalties: The sense of loyalty children feel towards both parents is very strong. There is a feeling of being split between two parents and this can prove to be a troublesome experience for children.

3. Confusion: The uncertainty which is inherent in the divorce experience causes considerable confusion particularly, in relation to a child's feelings.

4. Fear-Anxiety: The overwhelming nature of the unpleasant feelings combined with the uncertainty inherent in the divorce experience causes fear and worry in children. These fears and anxieties are primarily centered around negative emotional experiences arising from the many physical and psychological changes brought about by the dissolution of the pre-divorce nuclear family structure.

5. Grief: The rupture of the traditional family structure causes a great deal of grief in children's experiences. Generally, this grief centers primarily on a perceived loss of security which the nuclear family provided and a yearning for a child's absent parent.

6. Loneliness: Children experience an overwhelming sense of loneliness and vulnerability as a result of divorce. This loneliness is primarily centered around a child's longing for his or her absent parent. This creates a distressing experience for a child wherein he or she may feel left alone to deal with otherwise unfamiliar emotions.

7. Helplessness: A child's sense of vulnerability and obvious need for both physical and emotional support is expressed as a feeling of being helpless. Children experience a sense of losing control over their lives and emotions.

8. Need for Both Parents: Parents play a very important role in fulfilling a child's physical and emotional needs. Through the post-divorce period, the stress created impels children to a heightened awareness of their dependency on parental love and

emotional and physical support. This support provides the basis for children to reconstruct their identities and to forge new post-divorce parental relationships.

9. Self-Blame: Children may tend to blame themselves for the marital disruption and the ensuing unhappiness which is inherent in the divorcing process. Children may also experience an element of guilt arising from parental conflicts and this may manifest itself in the form of self-directed anger.

10. Reconciliation Wish: Children continue to express, in an overt or covert manner, a desire to have both parents reunite in the previous nuclear family structure.

11. Sense of Relief: An experience of relief signals that a child has begun to achieve a sense of mastery over the changes brought about by divorce. Relief is generally an indication that children perceive that certain aspects of post-divorce parenting or relationships are somehow enhanced by the divorce of their parents.

12. Acceptance: Children begin to experience a sense of mastery over physical and psychological changes which are intrinsically bound to the divorce process. This completion allows children to accept certain aspects of life in a divorced family structure. With acceptance, a child is free to resume normal developmental tasks, unencumbered by burdensome emotional difficulties.

13. Anger: An experience wherein the separation of a child's natural parents through divorce causes anger for the child. Children may experience hostile or aggressive feelings towards one or both parents.

14. Adjustment is Difficult: Adjusting to the many changes brought about by divorce is very difficult for children. Children experience overwhelming changes in their physical and psychological environments, leading to otherwise unfamiliar emotional experiences. The experiences of divorce and parental absence can be fraught with uncertainty and prove to be troublesome experiences which are very difficult to become accustomed to.

15. Need for Others' Acceptance: Children experience a need to have others demonstrate acceptance of them, within the newly defined family structure. Generally manifests as a desire to share feelings or experiences with significant others outside of a child's immediate family.

16. Denial: Children experience a multitude of negative emotional responses to divorce and at times have difficulty coping with the frequency and intensity of these feelings. Denial of ones' true feelings, helps a child to cope with unpleasant realities and in a sense, maintain a tolerable sense of personal emotional equilibrium.

17. Frustration: A child experiences a sense of frustration generally related to physical changes brought about by living or care arrangements during the post-divorce period. This experience of frustration appears to be related to adjustment difficulties which a child has resolved or developed a sense of mastery over.

Table 11

Second Order Themes Across all Children

Note: X indicates the presence of a given theme as an essential structure of that child's experience.

Second Order Themes	Stephen	Amanda	Linda	Jenney
1. Pain	X	X	X	X
2. Divided Loyalties		X	X	X
3. Confusion	X	X	X	X
4. Fear-Anxiety	X	X	X	
5. Grief	X	X	X	X
6. Loneliness	X	X	X	X
7. Helplessness	X	X	X	
8. Need for Both Parents	X	X	X	X
9. Self-Blame		X	X	
10. Reconciliation Wish	X	X	X	X
11. Sense of Relief	X	X	X	X
12. Acceptance		X	X	X
13. Anger		X	X	
14. Adjustment is Difficult	X	X	X	X
15. Need for Others' Acceptance	X	X	X	
16. Denial	X	X		
17. Frustration				X

Table 12

Third Order Abstraction of Common Clustered Themes

Third Order Themes	Common Clustered Themes (From Second Order Themes for All Children: Table 10)
1. Emotional Reactions to Divorce as a Traumatic Event	1. Pain 4. Fear-Anxiety 5. Grief 6. Loneliness 3. Confusion
2. Experiences of Loss Control	7. Helplessness 16. Denial 13. Anger 9. Self-Blame 17. Frustration
3. Coping With Division Versus Unity	2. Divided Loyalties 10. Reconciliation Wish 8. Need for Both Parents
4. Integration of the New Experiences	14. Adjustment Difficult 11. Sense of Relief 15. Need for Others' Acceptance 12. Acceptance

A Composite Picture of a Child's Experience

Introduction

Having done a thematic analysis of each child's protocol and outlined the essential structure of the four children's experiences, I have written a synthesis of each child's unique experience. The purpose of the final section of this chapter is to provide a composite picture of a child's experience of the phenomenon of divorce and parental absence.

Essentially, I have identified four third order thematic abstractions which will guide this discussion (Table 12). These include; "Emotional Reactions to Divorce as a Traumatic Event," "Experiences of Loss of Control by a Child," "Coping With Division Versus Unity," and "Integration of the New Experiences." Within each of these third order thematic abstractions, the author will utilize the generalized definition of themes across all children as well as refer to specific experiences of individual themes in order to comprehend the similarities and differences found within the essential structure of each child's experience.

Emotional Reactions to Divorce as a Traumatic Event

This study shows that divorce is an event which creates a great deal of trauma and distress in a child's experience. The distress is experienced through what I have referred to as negative emotional responses in a child's experience. These negative emotional reactions include feelings of pain, anxiety, fear, grief, lonelin-

ess, and confusion.

Unquestionably, the children involved in this study all experienced divorce as a painful process which produced many negative or unpleasant feelings. The intensity of the negative experiences caused each child to feel a sense of disequilibrium in their otherwise normal emotional state and created a feeling of on-going distress.

Divorce was experienced as a "traumatic event" which caused a deep sense of hurt in each child. The pain experienced from this trauma was closely associated with feelings of grief, loneliness and fear. These feelings seemed to breed confusion and uncertainty in the children's lives.

It is interesting to note the varying degrees of intensity of these feelings in the four children's experiences. Stephen and Amanda were clearly still experiencing pain as their parents had separated just over a year ago. While it had been almost five years since the parental separation in Linda's case, she too had experienced painful feelings although the intensity of these feelings had subsided. In Jenney's situation, her parents had separated almost six years ago and although she acknowledged experiencing pain, she had only vague recollections of this experience.

As the nuclear family structure breaks down, a child experiences a profound sense of sadness and loss and begins a grieving process as he or she mourns the loss of the pre-divorce family. Generally speaking, the children in this study experienced grief which centered primarily

around the perceived loss of stability and security which their former nuclear family structures provided. With the family breakup, children were forced into a position where they could no longer depend on both parents for immediate physical and psychological support. Their parents now lived in two different homes, creating a situation where they were faced with challenges or obstacles in maintaining close parental relationships. Unquestionably, they grieved for their absent parent and all expressed a yearning for this parent. The grief was a painful feeling in each child's experience.

Amanda and Stephen offered the sense that special occasions such as birthdays or Christmas were often experienced as times where they would be acutely aware of their grief and their feelings of loss. Stephen expressed sadness over the loss of contact with his friends. For these two children, the intensity of their sad experiences seemed to lead to some denial of their true feelings. At this point in their lives, their grief was still experienced as an enduring feeling which proved to be troublesome at times.

Linda and Jenney also acknowledged that the grieving process had been an experience which initially was very distressing. However, their grief had subsided in comparison to the other two children. Given time, they had grieved the loss of their pre-divorce family structure and had been able to develop a sense of mastery over these feelings.

Fear and anxiety were also identified as an essential part of a child's experience of divorce and parental

absence. The overwhelming nature of the negative emotional responses combined with the uncertainty and instability inherent in the divorcing process, helped to create these experiences. There was a sense that the nature of the negative emotional responses acted as a breeding ground for fear and subsequent anxiety over not being able to master these distressing feelings. The children's fear seemed to be closely related to painful feelings experienced as a result of divorce.

Children worried about their absent parent and how that parent was coping without them. They seemed to rationalize that their negative experiences without the absent parent were indicative that the parent was undoubtedly experiencing similar feelings and this caused a great deal of concern. The loneliness created by parental absence was clearly a source of fear.

The separation and divorce of the children's parents seemed to heighten their feelings of dependency on these significant adult figures. Amanda and Stephen were afraid of losing contact with their absent parent while Linda expressed a fear that neither of her parents really wanted her. Amanda was afraid that physical harm might come to her Mother and felt that women were more vulnerable than men and could not adequately defend themselves if harmful situations should arise.

Interestingly, Jenney's experience did not contain elements of fear and anxiety as was the case with the other children in this study. It is possible that she experienced similar feelings but, due to the length of time since her parents' divorce she had long since put to

rest, these experiences. This was substantiated in discussions with her Mother as she indicated that Jenney had indeed experienced an intense fear of losing contact with her parents, similar to the experiences of the other three children.

Loneliness is another essential structure in the emotional reactions to divorce as a traumatic event and seems to be an experience which endures. Loneliness in a child's experience is closely associated with feelings of pain, sadness, fear, and anxiety. All of these feelings are closely related and at times, are experienced simultaneously by children who are experiencing parental separation and divorce. In a child's feelings, grief is experienced as pain and this breeds fear and an awareness of loneliness. In turn, loneliness creates anxiety which leads to sadness and again experiences of pain. Its almost like a cycle of negative emotions which can be overwhelming and difficult to break.

The children in this study all expressed a profound sense of loneliness and vulnerability as a result of divorce and parental absence. It appears that this loneliness is primarily centered around a child's longing for his or her absent parent and a pining for the perceived security and stability of the pre-divorce family. This can create a distressing experience for children and a feeling of being left alone to deal with otherwise unfamiliar emotions.

Children are constantly reminded of their loneliness by everyday experiences within their lives. For example, Linda indicated that being with one parent acts as a

constant reminder of not being with the other parent. This creates a constant feeling of unfulfilled needs and a sense of emptiness which seems to endure. Children often experience a longing to be able to do things with both parents and strive to keep alive memories of the past even though these are often painful and reinforce the vulnerability that a child experiences.

There did seem to be qualitative differences in the four children's experiences of loneliness. Stephen and Amanda experienced intense feelings of loneliness and were still caught within the cycle of negative emotions which produced grief, fear, anxiety and pain. As yet, they do not appear to have developed a sense of mastery over their loneliness and it continues to be a source of great discomfort in their experiences. On the other hand, Linda and Jenney had managed to break out of the cycle of negative emotions and had begun to accept the loneliness as a part of their lives which they could not change. Jenney in particular, offered the sense that the loneliness created by divorce and parental absence is an experience which you can grow accustomed to, primarily due to the consistency she experienced in her custody arrangement. While Jenney and Linda have had a great deal more time to adjust to the loneliness than Stephen and Amanda had, it is very clear from their experiences that these feelings persist, despite the parental support they have both received.

Given the overwhelming nature of the emotional responses in the children's experiences of divorce, it is little wonder that confusion arises as an element of the

essential structure of these experiences. The uncertainty which is created in the divorce process causes considerable confusion. All of the children in this study experienced some degree of confusion as to how they really felt because of the rapid changes in both their physical and psychological environments. Prior to the upheaval created by divorce, these children had evidently not experienced negative emotional responses with such frequency or intensity and were, understandably, ill-equipped for what lay ahead. With the onset of the parental separation, the children's experiences were fraught with confusion and uncertainty as they struggled to regain a sense of psychological equilibrium which they could understand and tolerate.

The children also acknowledged that living in two homes can at times be a source of considerable confusion. Moving back and forth required physical and psychological adjustments which were troublesome at times. Children were concerned about forgetting special toys, articles of clothing or other important items. There also seemed to be a concern related to adjusting to the differences in the physical environments between two homes.

Stephen was distressed about having to remember two phone numbers, a reflection of the instability and confusion he was experiencing as a result of living in two homes. Jenney concurred with this view but offered the sense that while it can be confusing moving back and forth between two residences, it is something that you can become accustomed to.

Experiences of Loss of Control

While these experiences are still, in a sense, emotional responses on the part of a child and could be thought of as reactions to divorce as a traumatic event, they also reflect an essential structure of the children's experiences wherein they feel a certain loss of control as a result of divorce. The themes involved in this discussion of a child's experience of divorce include; "Helplessness," "Denial," "Anger," "Self-blame," and "Frustration."

The negative emotional responses of the children identified in the previous section all contribute to a feeling of helplessness in their experiences of divorce. During divorce a child may feel extremely vulnerable at a time when they are experiencing an obvious need for both physical and emotional support. In this time of crisis, the children experience a sense of losing control over their lives and emotions. Suddenly the familiarity and support of the nuclear family is gone and they must learn to cope with many changes and new realities brought about by divorce. This loss of control can create a feeling where a child is unsure of how to cope with the new experiences and feelings. Children may feel left out and alone with negative feelings and helpless in their struggle to understand the changes which are rapidly taking place.

Amanda struggled to understand why the parental separation had occurred and desired to know for sure, what lay ahead. She clearly felt that she had lost control over her life and experienced unfulfilled needs

in her struggle to understand and regain control over her emotions. Stephen and Linda had similar experiences where they too, felt a measurable loss of control. However, this experience of helplessness was not evident as an essential structure of Jenney's experience. It certainly is possible and highly probable that she also experienced this loss of control but did not display evidence of this because of the length of time since the parental separation and the sense of mastery she had achieved over the changes in her life as a result of the divorce.

As with feelings of helplessness, the negative emotional responses that a child experiences as a result of divorce, sow the seeds, for denial on the part of a child. When a child experiences a loss of control because of the intensity of the emotional responses, denial may be used as a coping mechanism. As noted, the intensity and frequency of negative experiences is very distressing for children and the unfamiliarity of these experiences can be very onerous. Consequently, children may deny the true nature of their feelings in an effort to cope with the unpleasant realities and maintain a tolerable sense of personal equilibrium.

Particularly distressing painful feelings of grief and loneliness seem to be the most common sources of denial in a child's experience. This denial may actually lead to mental blocks where the children effectively manage to push away the most hurtful feelings from their conscious experience. By effectively removing or reducing the intensity of these conscious experiences

children can more readily tolerate the dramatic emotional changes within their lives. However, these painful feelings undoubtedly still exist within their subconscious experience and may prolong adjustment difficulties.

There was very clear evidence of denial in Amanda and Stephen's experience of divorce. Amanda's experience was particularly illuminating as she described her poignant need to protect herself from the overpowering nature of her feelings. She likened the experience of denial to erecting a shield around herself, in order to protect herself from emotional destruction. It was not surprising given the time since parental separation, that denial as an essential structure, was not found in Linda's or Jenney's experience. It is likely that in the initial stages of parental separation denial may have been used as a coping mechanism but clear evidence of this was not found in their experiences.

Anger was identified as another essential part of the structure of the children's experiences. As separation and divorce destroyed the nuclear family, they experienced anger as an expression of their disapproval with this destruction. There was evidence to suggest that this anger could be found in two distinct configurations. The first of these involved covert hostility towards the parents for causing the emotional turmoil created by parental separation. The second form of this anger involved turning the anger inward upon oneself, in a form of self-blame.

The outer directed anger seemed to involve hostile

or aggressive feelings towards both parents while the inner directed anger involved a feeling where the children blamed themselves for the parental conflict and subsequent separation. The four children's experiences differed greatly in their expressions of this anger. Amanda seemed to be caught up in blaming herself for the parental separation and did express some feelings of covert hostility towards her parents. Linda offered the sense that she experienced some anger towards her parents and also felt a sense of self-blame. There was no clear evidence of either anger towards their parents or self-blame in Stephen's or Jenney's experience.

Amanda experienced some anger toward her parents over the breakdown of the marriage. While she did not express this in an overt manner, there was a covert feeling of resentment towards her Mom and Dad related to her feelings of sadness over the dissolution of the nuclear family. She reasoned that if her parents had been able to resolve their differences, the marriage breakdown would not have been necessary and subsequently she would not be feeling so distraught. She also believed with a reasonably strong conviction that she had caused some of the problems between her Mom and Dad and was, therefore, responsible for the parental separation. She felt that at times she had started the fights between her Mom and Dad because of her needs for parental attention and in a very real sense, felt that this may have been a cause of the separation. We spoke at length about her feelings of self-blame in our follow up interview and she appeared to have difficulty in accepting the notion that divorce was

an adult problem and that in no way was she responsible for what had happened.

Linda's experiences of anger and self-blame were similar to Amanda's in many respects. She too experienced a feeling of anger towards her parents because of the separation although, once again, this did not appear to be expressed in an overt manner. Linda felt that the marital breakup was in some ways an act of selfishness and that she was being left out and felt very much alone in dealing with her pain. This seemed to be the root cause of her anger towards her parents. Like Amanda, Linda also internalized some of her angry feelings and held herself partly responsible for the parental separation. She felt, with seemingly justifiable cause, that her Mom and Dad were fighting over the custody of her and that if she had not been there, maybe none of the conflict would have occurred. However, unlike Amanda, Linda was more able to accept that she was in fact not responsible for the conflict and had seemingly been able to let go of her feelings of self-blame.

Stephen did not express overt feelings of anger towards his parents nor did he seem to experience any readily visible signs of self-blame. This was not surprising given that Stephen seemed to experience difficulty in expressing his feelings in general. It is highly probable that as he struggled with his distressing experiences arising from the separation, he utilized denial to ward off these feelings or simply was not willing to talk about them. He expressed a very strong need for both parents and overt feelings of anger towards

his Mom and Dad may have threatened the love he felt for them.

Jenney too, did not express feelings of anger towards her parents or experiences of self-blame. While she had considerably more time to adjust to her situation than Stephen did, the absence of these feelings seemed to parallel Stephen's experience in some respects. She too, expressed a very strong need for both parents and quite possibly felt that expressions of anger would have threatened her love for them. However, unlike Stephen she seemed to be considerably more aware of her feelings and may have felt anger and self-blame in the initial stages of the separation, but time seemed to allow her to master these feelings or simply forget that they had at one time been a part of her experience.

The final component of this discussion of identified themes reflecting the children's experiences of loss of control as a result of divorce involves a rather curious theme which I have called "frustration." The reason I refer to this as a rather curious theme is that it occurred only in one child's experience of divorce. This theme involves a sense of frustration generally related to physical changes brought about by living or care arrangements during the post-divorce period.

In Jenney's experience there was a sense of frustration expressed over the lack of physical space in one of her parents' homes. Her Dad lived in a one room apartment where she and her Father had to share a bedroom. She found that this created a considerable amount of inconvenience and she felt that she had no control over

changing this situation. She also experienced a feeling of frustration over her after school care and expressed a strong desire to somehow change her care arrangements. Jenney also expressed a lingering sense of frustration over forgetting important items during transitions between her Mom's house and Dad's apartment.

While at first I speculated that these feelings represented experiences of subtle anger and difficulties in adjustment, my follow up interview with Jenney did not confirm this. She did not appear to possess an awareness of anger nor did she substantiate the notion that her feelings represented enduring adjustment difficulties in her experience. She simply felt frustrated with this aspect of her experience and it did not seem to present severe difficulties for her, largely because of the feelings of acceptance and mastery she had been able to attain throughout the divorcing process.

I have come to believe that these feelings of frustration are experiences which possibly arise out of previous anger or adjustment difficulties but may only surface after a child has seriously begun to accept his or her situation for what it is. In other words, these appear to be lingering feelings of previous experiences which the child has already mastered, but do not present serious difficulties for a child because of the acceptance which has been internalized. Jenney seemed to have internalized feelings of acceptance more than the other children in this study and it is likely that as the others gain more of a sense of mastery over their adjustment, they too, may feel similar experiences.

Coping with Division vs Unity

Given the many physical and psychological changes that the children experience as a result of divorce, there is a third general element of the essential structure of their experience which appears to be related to issues of "division versus unity." Divorce creates an obvious division in previously established parental relationships and presents the children with a whole new dimension of otherwise unfamiliar challenges. In learning to cope with the separation the children must, in a sense, re-establish parental relationships within the newly defined family structure. This is not an easy task for the children and there are many obstacles which must be overcome before children can begin to feel secure and develop a sense of stability and security in these new relationships. This section of the composite picture of the children's experience will examine the obstacles which they faced in the process of re-structuring parental relationships in the post-divorce family. The essential structures which relate to "division versus unity" issues in their experiences of divorce include; "Divided Loyalties," "Reconciliation Wishes," and "Need for Both Parents."

As children experience the physical separation of their parents they appear to possess a psychological desire for the unity which was experienced in the pre-divorce family structure. In the pre-divorce family, children develop a strong need and sense of loyalty towards both parents. Divorce cannot easily undo this sense of loyalty and in fact seems to make children more

acutely aware of their needs and feelings of loyalty towards both their mothers and their fathers. Divorce creates a feeling of being split between two parents and this can prove to be a troublesome experience for children.

A central component of the children's experiences of divided loyalties is an awareness of a strong love for each parent. In the pre-divorce family, their parents functioned as one unit, allowing them to freely express love for both parents. Divorce alters the family unit so that the children are no longer able to direct this love in a unified manner. In a metaphorical sense, the children must now divide their love into two separate and often hostile and opposing camps. While these two camps appear to be at war with each other, children must tread lightly in an effort not to offend either party and thereby threaten the love and support they need from the two opposing camps. This can be a very difficult experience for them.

The analogy drawn between opposing or hostile camps seems to fit well for three of the four children in this study. There was clear evidence of divided loyalties for the three girls involved in this study but no concrete evidence to suggest that this was an essential structure of Stephen's experience.

Amanda experienced a heightened sense of awareness of her parents' feelings and felt a strong need to please both parents. She offered the sense that neither parent was to blame for the separation and did not like comparing one parent to the other. She was very aware of her

love and need for both parents and seemed to appreciate their differences.

Linda expressed the feeling that she felt a definite split between her two parents and this caused her considerable pain. She experienced guilt for not thinking about her absent parent. When away from one parent or the other, she felt like she should be thinking about that parent and if she didn't, this seemed to cause considerable concern in her early experiences. She seemed to have grown accustomed to dividing her loyalties between both parents but at times still felt that this was a difficult experience.

Jenney's experience of divided loyalties was similar to Amanda's in that she too, seemed to possess a strong need to please both parents. She adamantly opposed the notion that either parent should shoulder the blame for the parental separation and expressed a strong desire to have each parent respond to her needs in a similar manner.

While Stephen expressed a strong need for love and support from both of his parents, he did not openly express feelings of divided loyalties as did the three girls. Once again, this seemed to be related to his inability to express the true nature of his feelings throughout the divorcing process. Because he felt a tremendous psychological burden because of his experiences there it may have been that he was struggling with having to divide his love between the two opposing camps.

Reconciliation wishes are another form of "division versus unity" issues that children experience as a re-

sult of divorce. While divorce clearly creates a physical division in the nuclear family, reconciliation wishes may prevent children from acknowledging and accepting the psychological reality of the separation. Reconciliation fantasies in a sense, allow children to keep alive the pre-divorce family unit, if only in memory. Children fantasize about the past and the way their lives used to be when their parents were together. They continue to express, in an overt or covert manner, their desire to have the parents reunite in the pre-divorce nuclear family structure. Reconciliation fantasies appear to function as a coping mechanism for children in their struggle to adjust to the physical and psychological changes inherent in the divorcing process. All of the children in this study displayed concrete evidence of reconciliation wishes as an essential structure of their experiences.

Amanda expressed a strong desire to have her parents reconcile their difference and reunite in the pre-divorce family. Seeing other families doing things together seemed to heighten her desire for parental reconciliation. Amanda's reconciliation fantasies seemed to be closely associated with her denial of the painful reality which she was experiencing and at times, she appeared to truly believe that her Mom and Dad would soon be back together. The parental separation seemed to end the overt hostilities between her parents and she interpreted this as offering hope for reconciliation. She did acknowledge that a small part of her doubted that reconciliation was possible but, continued to hope.

Stephen's experiences of reconciliation fantasies were similar to his sister's, except for the fact that he did not acknowledge any doubt that his wishes would one day come to fruition. He openly expressed a wish that they had never separated to begin with and felt a strong desire to be able to still do things together as a family. Stephen's reconciliation wishes also seemed to be clearly associated with his feelings of denial as he expressed a need to ease his personal suffering and restore the security and stability of the past.

Linda's experiences of reconciliation fantasies were understandably different from Amanda and Stephen's. She had a great deal more time to accept the reality of her situation and did not experience reconciliation wishes with the same intensity that Amanda and Stephen did. However, she strived to keep alive memories from the past and admitted that at times she still thought about reconciliation. Linda acknowledged that while she still thought about reconciliation, there was a great deal of doubt that this would ever become a reality.

Like Linda, Jenney's experiences of reconciliation were understandably different from the experiences of the other two children. Undoubtedly Linda and Jenney had experienced intense fantasies of reconciliation in the initial stages of the divorce but as reality sunk in they began to let go of these fantasies. Jenney no longer seemed to dwell on the past and while she acknowledged that a small part of her still wished that her Mom and Dad could be together she seemed to have accepted that this would probably never happen. While in some re-

spects, reconciliation fantasies do seem to be an enduring experience they did not seem to be overly troublesome for Linda and Jenney.

The final part of the essential structure of the children's experiences of "division versus unity" involves a need for both parents. The pre-divorce nuclear family provides a framework which supports children's needs in a unified manner. With divorce, this framework breaks down or divides and children are faced with a situation where they can no longer rely on a single structure to support their physical and psychological needs.

Unquestionably, parents play a very important role in helping children through various developmental stages. They provide the necessary physical and emotional support for children to master these developmental tasks and proceed to new levels in their development. Divorce does not alter the importance of the role parents play in their children's development. On the contrary, divorce appears to add an otherwise unfamiliar element of stress to normal developmental tasks, as children experience a heightened sense of awareness of their dependency on parental love and emotional and physical support. Satisfactory post-divorce parental support provides the basis for children to reconstruct new identities within the divorced family structure, forge new post-divorce parental relationships, and subsequently resume normal developmental growth. All of the children in this study expressed a definite need for physical and psychological support from both of their parents. Divorce did not in

any way diminish their needs for parental support.

All four children expressed a strong love and need for continued support from both parents. They experienced a need to feel loved and supported and offered the sense that they needed to feel like they were an important part of their parents' lives. They maintained very strong desires to be able to communicate and share their feelings with their absent parent and frowned upon undue restrictions placed on this contact. Given that they were all involved in joint custody arrangements, they seemed to express feelings of appreciation for the parental support they had received through clearly troubling times.

Both Amanda and Stephen expressed a desire to see their parents still do things together whether it be simply to get together for dinner or chat over a cup of tea. They were keenly aware of their need for both parents during special occasions like birthdays or Christmas. While they were obviously still both suffering from the traumatic effects of the separation, they felt like the continued parental support had helped to ease some of their painful experiences.

Linda and Jenney, also felt that continued parental support had helped to ease their painful and lonely experiences. They seemed to be aware of how this continued support provided a sense of consistency throughout the troubling times they experienced in the initial post-separation period. To this date, they both maintain very positive relationships with both of their parents. As they had begun to master the changes in

their lives and establish their own identities within their divorced families, there was evidence to suggest that this [redacted] enabled them to both develop a positive sense of self-esteem. Their parents had allowed them to experience a sense of control over their contact with the absent parent and this was clearly helpful in their experiences.

Integration of the New Experiences

The final general element of the essential structure of a child's experience of divorce involves attempts by a child to integrate the new experiences. Divorce can be thought of as a hierarchial process, much like developmental stages in growth, where a child must successfully master previous stages before proceeding to the next stage. As children begin to master the traumatic effects of divorce and the "experiences of loss of control," they become more capable of coping with issues of "division versus unity." As these experiences are integrated, children move along a continuum towards the ultimate acceptance of the divorce.

This section of the composite picture of the childrens experiences of divorce will include a discussion of four themes identified as essential structures of a child's experience. These include; "Adjustment is Difficult," " Sense of Relief," " Need for Others' Acceptance," and "Acceptance."

Adjusting to the many changes inherent in the divorcing process is clearly not an easy process and the evidence in this study suggests that this process is

fraught with a great deal of uncertainty and distress. This section summarizes these difficult experiences. As noted, successful mastery of the divorce process appears to be highly dependent upon resolving the many emotional and physical changes which occur as a result of divorce.

Amanda and Stephen's experiences are particularly helpful in understanding and appreciating the difficulties that children experience. As the parental separation in their lives was relatively recent, they were still very much involved with the painful experiences of "divorce as a traumatic event." Grief and loneliness were very much a part of their experiences as they longed for the security of the past and experienced intense anxieties, fear, feelings of helplessness, and confusion. They utilized denial as a coping mechanism to assist them in maintaining some control over these unpleasant experiences.

Linda and Jenney had, undoubtedly, felt similar experiences in their initial post-separation periods but had more time to integrate these experiences and resolve loyalty conflicts and accept the futility of their reconciliation fantasies.

All of the children in this study acknowledged that living their lives in two separate homes is a difficult experience and one that causes considerable adjustment difficulties. While they expressed strong desires and needs for continued parental love and support from both parents, they found moving between two homes a difficult experience to become accustomed to. There was a lingering sense that the multiple transitions required by their

joint custody arrangements, created considerable confusion as they struggled to adjust. When this was combined with their need to forge new post-divorce parental relationships, the process at times was rather onerous. However, there was a sense that mastery over the many physical and psychological changes could be achieved given continued parental support and time.

All of the children in this study experienced a sense of relief which was generally related in some way or another to the development of positive post-divorce parental relationships. This sense of relief appeared to signal that, in some manner, the children had begun to achieve some feelings of mastery over the changes brought about by the divorce. In this study, the experiences of relief were generally an indication that the children perceived that certain aspects of post-divorce parenting were somehow enhanced by the parental separation.

In Stephen and Amanda's experiences there appeared to be a good deal of overt hostility between their parents before the actual separation occurred. With the separation this conflict and hostility ended, and both children felt a definite feeling of relief. There was a feeling that this reduced parental conflict was helpful as they took pleasure in the renewed sense of cooperation the parents demonstrated in caring for their needs. While they both had a long way to go, particularly so in Stephen's case, their feelings of relief were encouraging. Hopefully, given time and continued support they will be able to resolve and integrate their experiences and learn to fully accept their divorced family struc-

ture.

Linda's experiences were similar to those of Amanda and Stephen in that she too, felt that the cessation of overt parental hostilities had been helpful for her. Initially, she had been very worried that the parental hostilities were harmful for her parents and as these hostilities ended she was relieved that neither parent would be hurt any more. Jenney's experiences were also similar to Amanda and Stephen's in that she felt a sense of relief that her parents could still cooperate and help to support her both physically and psychologically.

A seemingly trivial experience but, nonetheless, one of vital importance for the children and their ability to achieve mastery over the changes in their lives was their need for the acceptance of significant others in their lives. In general, the children in this study felt a need to have others demonstrate acceptance of there newly defined family structure. They expressed a need to share their feelings and experiences with friends and extended families and when they found that they were not rejected by these significant others, there was an experience of relief.

It was interesting to note that all of the children maintained very positive relationships with the extended families of both of their parents. While there was no evidence of this in the formal semi-structured interviews, the children were questioned about their relationships with their extended families during followup interviews. Grandparents appeared to be a particularly stabilizing force for these children and continued

contact allowed the children to retain some semblance of security related to their past and their pre-divorce nuclear families.

The final step in integrating or mastering the many physical and psychological changes which are intrinsically bound to the separation and divorce process is "acceptance." As alluded to in the beginning of this section, acceptance seems to be highly dependent on the successful resolution of previous experiences. Children must come to grips with their unpleasant feelings and more or less, let go of these experiences. As they master these experiences they are more readily able to accept their post-divorce family. This often long, painful, and tedious process can literally take years.

Successful resolution of unpleasant experiences does not necessarily mean that these feelings are gone from a child's experience completely. It does mean that a child has overcome the burdensome nature of the experience and in a sense develops a feeling of completion with the feelings involved in the experience. With acceptance, a child is free to resume normal developmental tasks, unencumbered by disturbing emotional difficulties. The experiences of the four children in this study varied greatly in their ability to successfully resolve their unpleasant experience and achieve acceptance.

In Stephen's experience, there was no evidence to suggest that he had mastered any of his unpleasant experiences except for the fact that he experienced a sense of relief over the cessation of parental hostilities and appreciated the cooperation that his Mom and Dad

demonstrated over the care of himself and his sister Amanda. While this sense of relief seems to be a prerequisite for achieving feelings of mastery, acceptance still managed to elude Stephen.

Amanda, also experienced feelings of relief similar to Stephen's experiences but there was evidence to suggest that while her experiences were still predominantly painful, she was beginning to accept certain aspects of the parental separation. She was able to acknowledge that there were some good thing about her Mom and Dad being separated and expressed a feeling that acceptance would be easier because of the reduced parental conflict and the consistent support she received from both of her parents. While reconciliation fantasies were very much a part of her experience, her acknowledgement of self-doubt, however slight it may have been, was a positive indication that she was beginning to accept the reality of her situation. Her quest for understanding and her willingness to freely explore her feelings are certainly encouraging indications that she can resolve her difficulties, given proper support and time.

Linda demonstrated some very positive indications that she was actively involved in resolving the many burdensome emotional experiences associated with her Mom and Dad's divorce. She had experienced feelings of relief over the ending of parental hostilities and was very aware of the cooperation between her parents. She had experienced a great deal of consistency in parental contact and had come to appreciate a new found sense of privacy with each parent. She had also come to appreci-

ate that her needs were separate and distinct from her parents's needs and appeared to be developing a strong sense of personal identity within her divorced family. In her development of a strong sense of personal identity, she showed evidence of developing positive feelings of self-esteem.

Jenney seemed to demonstrate more concrete evidence of acceptance than any of the other children in this study. She appeared to have internalized a reason for her parents' divorce which avoided placing blame on herself or either of her parents. She had come to accept parental absence as a reasonable part of her life because of the consistency she experienced with her custody arrangement. She no longer seemed to dwell on parental absence or past experiences and accepted that her reconciliation wishes were essentially meaningless as reconciliation would undoubtedly never come to pass.

Jenney had developed a very strong sense of personal identity within her divorced family and seemed to possess a positive feeling of self-esteem. The continued love and support she had experienced throughout the divorcing process unquestionably helped her to resolve many of the early emotional difficulties in her experience and time was on her side. She openly admitted that her Mom and Dad were probably better off apart and desired happiness for herself and her parents.

Conclusion

The composite picture of the children's experiences of divorce is extremely complex as evidenced by the

findings of this study. Children experience many distressing feelings with varying degrees of intensity and unquestionably each develops their own unique coping mechanisms to deal with the physical and psychological changes brought about by divorce. While some experiences such as loneliness and reconciliation fantasies do seem to endure, it does appear that children can achieve mastery and acceptance over the changes which are intrinsically bound to divorce. While I have attempted to provide an exhaustive description of children's experiences, there are undoubtedly essential structures of children's experiences which could be explored in much greater detail. After investigating the experiences of the four children who participated in this study, I was led to conclude that perhaps the two most important factors related to positive post-divorce adjustment are, continued parental support, and time.

Chapter V

Final Discussion

Introduction

It was acknowledged at the very beginning of this study that divorce is a process which is rapidly changing the traditional structure of families within our society. The pervasiveness of divorce in our society has reached alarming proportions and we only need look around us to see evidence of this. We see the consequences of divorce in the work place, in the schools, in our neighbourhoods, and perhaps even in our own families. As we look around and see those among us who have experienced divorce, we may perceive both positive and negative effects in those individuals involved. Rarely, will we ever see a divorce that does not entail some measure of suffering for all who are involved. This is particularly true for the children of divorce.

Undeniably, divorce is a solution to the unhappiness for the adults in a marriage which has gone sour. It is not a solution to the children of divorce but more, the beginning of a journey through uncertainty and otherwise unexplored emotional and physical changes. It is a journey that children do not ask for and one that they are generally ill-prepared to embark on. It is often a traumatic journey in which there is no turning back. The experiences in the divorce process profoundly affect children and can seemingly continue to affect them for years, and perhaps even decades.

The intent of this study was to examine the experiences of children as they went through this journey and to gain insight into the many challenges which must be met in the process of a child's experience of divorce. The study sought to answer the question; what is a child's actual experience of divorce? It also focused on the question of how a child actually experienced the absence of a parent in the post-divorce family structure. It asked whether each child's experience was fundamentally different or whether there were similarities or patterns of responses which characterized children's experiences of divorce and parental absence.

The study utilized a phenomenological approach to inquiry because of the compatibility of this methodology with the exploration of human experiences. It is my contention, that the study was highly successful in producing some very definite answers, in great detail, to the questions that were asked. The purpose of this final chapter is to look at these answers and reflect on divorce literature which has also examined children's experiences. It will also allow me a chance to reflect personally on the data which was generated in this study and to relate the implications of this research to future research which investigates the experiences of children of divorce.

Reflections on Divorce Literature

As Wallerstein (1981) indicates, the field of divorce research has been and remains a lonely field where the number of studies are perilously low given the

magnitude of the problem (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). After undertaking this study, I have come to appreciate the veracity of her perceptions. Exploring the experiences of children of divorce is not an easy task largely because of the intimate nature of the feelings one is trying to uncover. It is not easy to walk into a child's life as a virtual stranger and develop a sense of rapport and trust which will allow a child to freely explore the nature of their divorce related experiences. It requires a great deal of cooperation on the part of parents and children, and a sensitivity on the part of the researcher in order to create a safe environment in which to explore, what are often very painful experiences.

I was deeply moved by my experiences with the four children as we explored their feelings and perceptions. Through these children I was able to understand and grasp the enormity of the challenges they faced. As the data was gathered from these children and analyzed, it became evident that although each child's experience was truly unique, there were certain commonalities of shared experiences. They all experienced divorce as a traumatic event in their lives. It was an event that made them feel like they had lost control over their feelings and one that created tremendous physical and psychological changes. To reflect on current divorce literature, it will be necessary to briefly summarize and highlight some of the experiences of the four children in this study.

The rupture of the traditional family structure was the beginning of a painful process which was filled with an overwhelming feeling of sadness. As the children

grieved, they experienced profound feelings of loss and loneliness. They yearned for their absent parent and the security and stability of the past. The uncertainty and overwhelming nature of the emotional experiences created a breeding ground for fear. The children worried about how they would cope and how their parents were coping. They worried that with all of the dramatic changes that were rapidly taking place, they would lose contact with their absent parent. They were particularly worried about losing contact with their fathers. It is little wonder that confusion was a common part of their experiences. With this confusion the children experienced feelings of helplessness and showed evidence of using denial to cope with their painful realities. All of these initial reactions to divorce appear to be consistent with other research which has examined divorce from a child's per- spective (Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Anger was mostly a response which was inhibited by the children in this study. Wallerstein found that younger children do seem to inhibit their anger, particularly towards their fathers. In her study, when anger was demonstrated it was generally directed towards a child's mother and boys were more commonly the ones involved (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Two of the children in this study expressed feelings of covert hostility towards their parents as a result of the marriage breakup but they did not specify that this anger was directed more at one parent than the other. They also did not act upon this anger in an overt manner but

tended to keep it to themselves. Like the children in the Wallerstein study, their anger was an inhibited feeling which they did not express.

Expressions of self-directed anger were another common experience of the children in this study and again this was consistent with the findings of other studies that looked at the experiences of seven to nine year old children (Wallerstein, 1983). These experiences of self-blame seemed to be a common emotional reaction among younger children. In this experience, children tended to blame themselves for the marital disruption and ensuing unhappiness which is inherent in the divorcing process. The children in this study seemed to have a difficult time letting go of self-blame and appeared to be deeply concerned about these feelings.

I was struck by the profound sense of loneliness the children in this study expressed and how enduring some of these feelings seemed to be. Separation and divorce created intense feelings of loneliness primarily due to a longing for a child's absent parent. Initially, parental absence was an experience which was very distressing and the source of great pain for the children. Again, this was consistent with findings from other studies which demonstrated that children of all ages experience a yearning for the absent parent and troublesome feelings of loneliness (Hetherington & Camara, 1984).

Having two children in the study who had only recently experienced parental separation and two that experienced the separation years ago, produced some interesting contrasts. This was evident in the child-

ren's experiences of loneliness. While two of the children were still experiencing distressing feelings of loneliness, the other two seemed to have grown accustomed to their feelings. However, growing accustomed to the feelings of loneliness did not mean that these feelings no longer existed in the children's experiences. There was no question that the feelings still existed and that at times they could still prove to be bothersome. Loneliness was an enduring feeling in these children's experiences. It is important to remember that these were joint custody children who spent proportionately equal amounts of time with both of their parents. One can easily appreciate the difficulties these enduring feelings of loneliness could create in children who have little or no contact with their absent parents.

Interesting contrasts were also found in the children's experiences of reconciliation fantasies. The two children whose parents had recently separated were very much involved in constructing fantasies of the family reuniting. They seemed to dwell on the past and the pre-divorce family and longed for the security of this unit. They saw reconciliation as a way to end their suffering and restore the stability they so desperately seemed to need. For the two children whose parents had separated years ago, their was evidence that they had grown accustomed to their reconciliation desires. They did not seem to spend as much energy dwelling on the past and had begun to accept that reconciliation would probably never happen. They did however acknowledge that reconciliation wishes were at times, still a part of

their experiences. While reconciliation fantasies also seemed to be an enduring experience they did not seem to be a potential source of difficulty, as was the case with their enduring feelings of loneliness.

Loneliness and reconciliation fantasies seem to be enduring experiences which can last for years after the initial parental separation. These findings are consistent with longitudinal studies which have examined the long term effects of divorce on children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Of course how these enduring feelings effect a child will depend on many factors relative to a child's overall adjustment process. There is a suggestion in the research literature that enduring feelings of loneliness can create long term problems for children (Hetherington, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985). Problems such as low self-esteem, immature behavior, and depression can conceivably be related to these enduring feelings of loneliness. Fortunately, for the two children in this study whose parents had separated years ago, there was no evidence of chronic long term adjustment difficulties which could be attributed to lingering feelings of loneliness.

Loyalty conflicts seem to be a common problem for children of divorce (Elkin, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Divorce seems to heighten a child's awareness of parental feelings and they experience a definite need to please both parents. With their parents separated, children still feel a strong need to love both their mom and their dad, and this can create feelings of being pulled in two different directions. Loyalty conflicts

.can arise and these can be burdensome experiences.

The children in this study experienced feelings of divided loyalties. However, these did not appear to create enduring difficulties. They all expressed a strong sense of loyalty with both parents and evidently had some difficulty initially in balancing their loyalties. But in the long run, they seemed to be adjusting to these experiences and were certainly not crippled by on-going loyalty conflicts. It seems evident that the nature of their custody arrangements allowed them more freedom to freely love each parent. Through joint physical custody, they experienced consistent parental contact and each parent seemed to value the other parent's role. Consistent with joint custody literature (Steinman, 1981), this seemed to create a situation where the children were encouraged to develop positive relationships with both parents. They took full advantage of this.

While divorce may alter the structure of the family unit, it does not alter a child's need for both parents. Children need the active involvement of both parents and there is a sense in the research literature that it is a child's right to continue to receive emotional support from both mothers and fathers (Poll, 1981). It is evident that in situations where sole custody is the norm, children may suffer immeasurably from the loss of consistent contact with the non-custodial parent (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). Proponents of joint custody acknowledge that this arrangement can aid a child's adjustment to divorce by allowing children to retain what

is referred to as, two psychological parents (Fidler et al., 1989). Joint custody clearly recognizes that while divorce alters family relationships, it certainly does not end them (Arbarbanel, 1979).

In general, the children in this study appeared to have benefitted from the continued active involvement of both parents. Once again, there were some interesting contrasts in the experiences of the four children. The two children whose parents had separated a number of years ago demonstrated the most visible signs of benefitting from their joint custody arrangements. While they had clearly experienced divorce as a traumatic event in the initial post-separation period and for some time to come, the consistency they experienced in receiving continued emotional and physical support from their parents proved helpful in the long run. They were able to resolve many of their initially painful experiences and develop a renewed sense of functioning consistent with the experiences of other children in joint custody arrangements (Arbarbanel, 1979). They were clearly able to retain two psychological parents and showed evidence of developing a strong sense of identity within their divorced family structures. As with other joint custody children, they showed indications of possessing positive feelings of self-esteem (Wolchik et al., 1985).

However, for the other two children, clear benefits directly associated with the active involvement of both parents was not as evident. Having only recently experienced the parental separation in their family, they were still very much involved with their painful experiences

and as yet did not display the renewed sense of functioning that the other two children had demonstrated. While they undoubtedly appreciated the continued emotional and physical support that their custody arrangements allowed them to maintain, they appeared to be still somewhat confused by the many physical and psychological changes they were experiencing. One of the children was particularly distressed over the many changes and demonstrated experiences of anxiety and confusion consistent with Steinman's (1981) study of children in joint custody arrangements.

In general, for the other three children it would be safe to conclude that while they experienced initial feelings of anxiety and confusion as a result of their custody arrangements they were not unduly burdened or tormented by these experiences. These findings were similar to those in Luepnitz's (1986) study where the children found living in two homes to be advantageous in some respects. Perceived advantages for the children in this study ranged from having literally two sets of everything to feelings of a new found sense of privacy with each parent.

Another clear advantage, seemingly related to their custody arrangements was that these children were able to maintain very positive relationships with the extended families of both parents. This advantage has been documented in divorce literature as proponents of joint custody believe that these arrangements allow children to experience a wider network of adult role models and preserve relationships with the kin of both biological

parents (Wolchik et al., 1985). Grandparents appeared to be a particularly stabilizing force for the children in this study, allowing the children to maintain some sense of security related to their pasts and their pre-divorce nuclear families.

In assessing the overall adjustment of the children in this study, it appears evident that the continued open and easy access to both parents has been a positive factor in helping the children to resolve emotional difficulties and develop feelings of mastery and acceptance related to the many changes inherent in the divorcing process. This concurs with Wallerstein's findings, as she believes that continued parental involvement is critically important for children to be able to overcome the hardships and difficulties arising from divorce (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

It also appears to be evident that time is a major factor related to acceptance of the physical and psychological changes intrinsically bound to the divorcing process (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). For the two children in this study, whose parents had divorced years ago, there were indications that acceptance was becoming a reality in their lives. In a very real sense, these children were experiencing feelings of completion and acceptance related to certain aspects of their feelings and their divorced families. They did however offer the sense that it had in no way been an easy process and that it had taken literally years, before they began to feel okay with their situations.

Unfortunately for the other two children, time was not as yet on their side. While their custody arrangement had allowed them to maintain the active involvement of both parents, they still had many difficult obstacles to overcome. While one of these two children was obviously struggling with the many changes, more so than the other, there was hope that given time, they too would eventually be able to resolve their emotional difficulties and accept their divorced family structure.

While life was obviously not a bed of roses for any of these children, they showed a great deal of courage in their attempts to understand the changes which took place so rapidly, in their lives. While this study attempted to understand the nature of their experiences of divorce and parental absence, at times it feels like I have only scratched the surface of experiences that could be explored in far greater detail. That is the challenge which awaits future researchers, who seek to understand children's experiences of divorce.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to systematically investigate children's experiences of divorce and parental absence. While the phenomenological methodology utilized to explore these experiences was highly successful in uncovering the essential structure of each child's experience, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in generalizing the findings of this study to the larger population of divorced children. Admittedly, the sample size was very small as time and resources only

allowed me an opportunity to investigate the experiences of four children. However, if one considers that the essence of a phenomenological method of inquiry is to explore the everyday lived experiences of a phenomenon, then questions of sample size, control groups, and generalizability are secondary concerns which need not invalidate the experiences of the phenomenon being investigated in this study.

Perhaps, the most important concern related to the validity of the findings in a phenomenological research project is the extent to which the interpreted structure of the phenomenon reflects the experience of others who have encountered the phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). We ask the question; how does the interpreted structure of children's experiences of divorce, reflect the experiences of other children who have encountered divorce? It was clearly evident that the experiences of the children in this study were consistent with the findings of other researchers who have investigated children's reactions to divorce. In a sense, previous research examining children's experiences of divorce, acts as the control group for the validity of the findings in this study. Given the consistency of the findings of this study with other research, it is safe to conclude that the findings of this study do, in fact, represent a true picture of the essential structure of children's experiences of divorce.

It is important to remember that the essential structures of experience outlined in this study are the experiences of children living in joint physical custody arrangements. As there is very little research directly

related to the effects of joint custody arrangements on children, this is a significant contribution to the body of research which does exist. This study has focused specifically on the experiences of children who are living in joint custody arrangements. It has provided useful insights into the effects of these arrangements on children.

It would be interesting to conduct a study of this nature on a much larger scale where one could control for time since parental separation. This would be helpful in exploring specific child characteristics which lead to successful or deleterious outcomes in children's adjustment to joint custody arrangements. It would also be extremely useful to conduct longitudinal studies of this nature to ascertain how joint custody settlements in childhood, affect children as they mature into adolescence and adulthood.

A major drawback of all divorce research which examines children's experiences of divorce is that these studies largely include middle class children and do not effectively tap into the experiences of children in lower socio-economic populations. A phenomenological research project would be ideally suited to examining the experiences of these children and could provide helpful insights as to the specific nature of their experiences and whether these experiences are consistent with the experiences of middle class children.

It was my hope that this research would be able to be utilized by others who seek to understand how divorce affects children. I can be content in believing that

this project has succeeded in adding an important contribution to our knowledge base of children's experiences of divorce. Hopefully, by developing a deeper understanding of their experiences, we will be able to help them to heal the wounds that divorce creates. I began this study believing that for children, divorce is much like a wound that requires stitches to close it up. In time, the wound heals but the scar may last forever. I leave this study unchanged in my belief, but I feel that I am now more prepared to help children with the healing process. My hopes and aspirations are that others will share in this belief and that they will also be more sensitive to the needs of children who experience divorce in their lives.

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Appendix I

Interview Questions

Background Information

(1) What is your name?

(2) How old are you now?

(3) How old were you when your Mom and Dad first separated?

(4) What are your Mom and Dad's first names?

(5) Do you have any brothers or sisters? If so, how old are they?

(6) How do you feel about being asked questions about your Mom and Dad's divorce?

(7) Where abouts did you live when your Mom and Dad used to live together?

(8) Can you describe for me what your room looked like in that house?

Essential Questions

(9) What do you remember about living together with both your Mom and Dad?

(10) Why do you think your Mom and Dad decided to separate?

(11) How did it make you feel when they first split up?

(12) Who did you stay with when Mom and Dad first split up? How did you feel about that?

(13) Where did your other parent stay when Mom and Dad separated?

(14) Did you have to move because of the divorce?

(15) Do you now have a room of your own at Mom and Dad's?

(16) Do you remember being afraid of anything when Mom and Dad first split up?

(17) Did you think anyone was to blame for Mom and Dad splitting up?

(18) Tell me what it feels like when you are away from your Mom?

(19) Tell me what it feels like when you are away from your Dad?

(20) Can you think of some good things about Mom and Dad not living together any more?

(21) Can you tell me some of the things that you don't like about having a Mom and Dad that live in two separate houses?

(22) Can you think of some things that you used to be able to do with your Mom that you can't do anymore, since the divorce?

(23) Can you think of some things that you used to be able to do with your Dad that you can't do anymore, since the divorce?

(24) What kind of things make you mad at your Mom or Dad?

(25) Are there some things about the divorce that make you mad?

(26) What has been the hardest thing for you, with Mom and Dad living in two houses?

(27) Do you bring special toys or things with you when you go to your other parent's house?

(28) How do you feel about having to go back and forth

between your Mom's house and your Dad's house?

(29) When you are at your Dad's house, can you tell me about a time when you would think about your Mom?

(30) Are there certain things that make you think about your Mom when you are at your Dad's house?

(31) Can you tell me about a time when you were at Mom's house and you thought about your Dad?

(32) Are there certain things that make you think about Dad when you are at your Mom's house?

(33) Do you still think about when your Dad and Mom used to live together?

(34) Are you able to phone your Mom or Dad when you want to?

(35) Do you think your Mom is happy now?

(36) Do you think your Dad is happy now?

(37) What about you, are you happy now?

(38) Do you think your relationship with your Mom has gotten better or worse since the divorce?

(39) Do you think your relationship with your Dad has gotten better or worse since the divorce?

(40) If you had a power that would allow you to change something, what do you think you would want to change?

(41) Do you think your Dad is ever lonely?

(42) Do you think your Mom is ever lonely?

(43) What about you, do you ever feel lonely?

(44) Has it been easy or hard for you to adjust to the divorce?

(45) Do you think that you will ever get married?

(46) Let's pretend that you are a famous person, kind of a counsellor, or a person who helps other people with their feelings and that you are helping children who have just experienced a divorce. What kinds of things would you tell them that might be able to help them?

(47) Is there anything in particular that you think has been helpful for you throughout the divorce?

(48) Were you able to tell your friends about the divorce?

(49) Was it hard to tell your friends at first? How did they react?

(50) This is another pretend situation. If you were granted three wishes, what would you wish for?

Probing Questions

These questions will be designed to elicit more specific information from the child's responses to the essential questions outlined above. The nature of these probes will ultimately depend on the response of the child to the initial question. It will be important to zero in on the child's feelings and elicit more specific information and descriptions related to these feelings. Sample probes may include items like: How did you feel about that? Can you tell me more about that feeling? Can you describe that feeling for me? How did you experience that feeling?

Appendix II

May 21, 1991

From: Ron Mangan
Dept. of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta

Attn: Parents

During the past several years I have been involved in exploring the effects of divorce on both children and adults. As a result of a divorce in my own life, I am acutely aware of the physical and psychological difficulties involved in adjusting one's life to this process. The transition from married life to divorce is often very difficult especially when children are involved. Research studies have attempted to look at the effects of divorce in relation to a child's development. Although much of this work has been useful in identifying both negative and positive consequences of divorce, there is still a great deal to be learned regarding the nature of theses consequences. It is important that we continue to try and understand the divorcing process, particularly through the eyes of children. That is the purpose of the study I am currently undertaking.

I am particularly interested in exploring a child's experience of divorce related parental absence. How does a child experience the absence of a parent in post-divorce family life? This study will focus on the

experiences of seven to nine year old children who are currently living in a co-custody situation. Each child will be interviewed and asked to share their experiences within a semi-structured interview format.

Children involved in this study will be informed as to the nature of the interview content. After reviewing this content with a child he or she will be given the opportunity to consent to participate in a formal interview. It will be important for each child to realize that he or she does not have to feel compelled to answer all questions and that they may choose to withdraw at any point in time. The ultimate aim is to have the child feel comfortable with the interviewer and the process which is to be undertaken. The actual formal interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded on audio tape. More than one interview may be necessary with each child. It will be important to meet with a parent and the child prior to formal interviewing in order to gather necessary background information and to ensure that the child understands and is capable of exploring the phenomenon of divorce related parental absence. Hopefully, this will allow the child an opportunity to develop a sense of trust in myself and the process which is to be undertaken.

The sensitive nature of this study will, unquestionably, require parental support. By allowing your child to freely explore thoughts and feelings related to

divorce and parental absence, it is hoped that he or she can gain a deeper understanding of his or her own unique situation. Parents will be provided with a written summary and discussion of the general findings and results of this study. It will be important for parents to acknowledge a child's right to confidentiality when it comes to sharing specific information related to the study. The study should allow parents to develop a deeper sensitivity and awareness of the needs of children who have experienced divorce. I would hope that my knowledge and sensitivities related to divorce, will benefit both the children and parents who choose to become involved in this project.

All information gathered will be held in strict confidence and measures will be taken to protect the identity of those involved. It is important to acknowledge that parents, like the children, do have the freedom to opt out at any point in time. Parents will be required to provide written consent for the participation of their child on the enclosed form. If there are questions or concerns regarding any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact Ron Mangan at 436-4406.

Sincerely,

Ronald M. Mangan

Consent Form

My child (name:) _____
has permission to participate in this study, on divorce related parental absence.

_____
Parent Signature